A Venture in 1777

by S. Weir Mitchell

Mitchell
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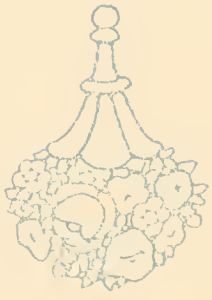

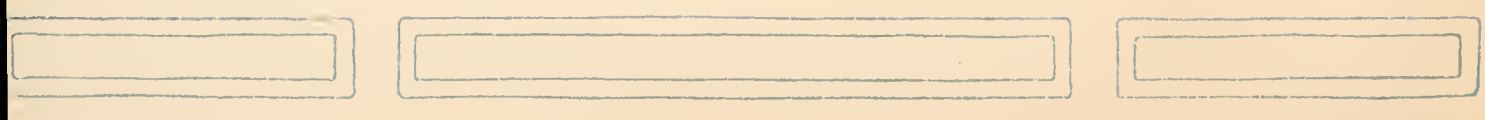

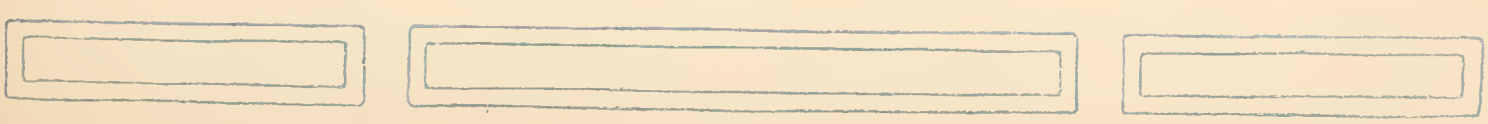

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A VENTURE IN 1777

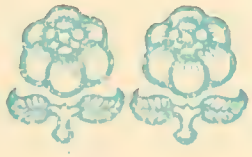
"Why, this is Major Montresor's own map!"

A Venture In 1777

By

S. Weir Mitchell

Author of
Hugh Wynne, Mr. Kris Kringle
etc



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PREFACE

NEAR to Philadelphia in the country is the Church Home for Children. Here during half a century one thousand girls have been carefully educated for domestic service. At the age of sixteen these children are placed in families selected with care. Their future as to wages, usage and general surroundings becomes for years the object of thoughtful inquiry and kindly interest on the part of members of the Managing Board charged with this duty.

No one can visit this great family

without observing the healthy appearance of the children and the happy ease of their relations to their teachers. These little women folk carry on in turn all the household duties. But whether at work, at play, in school, or busy over their own small gardens, they carry a look of enjoyment, comfort and contentment which continuously justifies the belief that this is indeed a home: how well it deserves to be so called is to be seen when year after year former pupils return grateful for their training in the conduct of life and in the art of the household.

With high appreciation of the women whose dutiful constancy

has created and kept up the perfect methods of this most Christian labor, I offer with my admiration and sympathy whatever this little story may win from the pockets of the public.

S. WEIR MITCHELL

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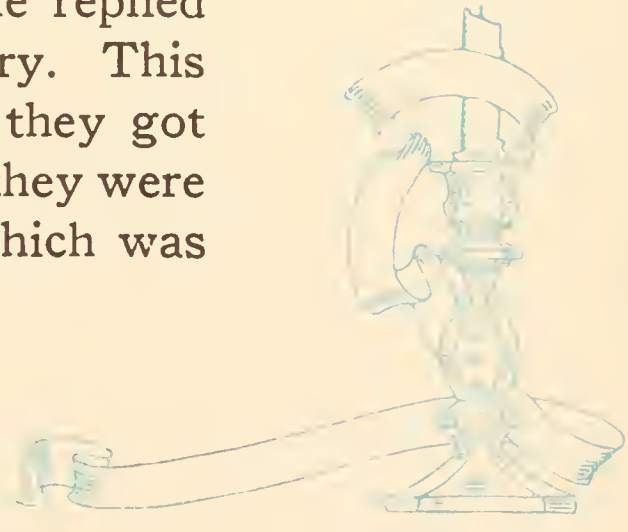
CHAPTER I

In Which Captain Verney Receives a Map

CHAPTER I

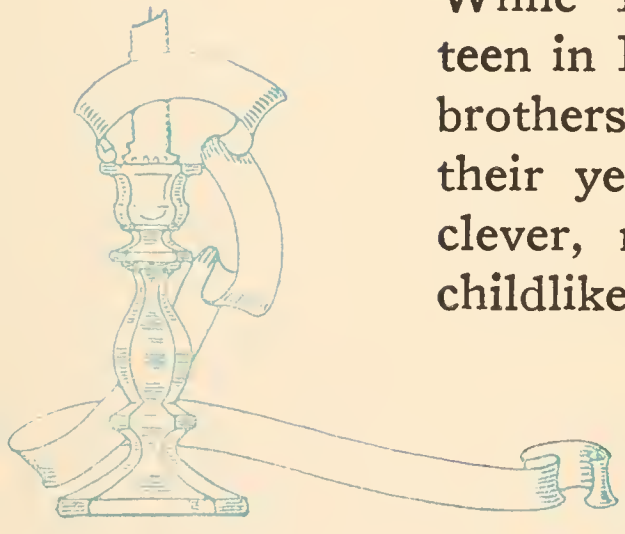
THIS is a story of a boy and two other boys.

Tom Markham was fifteen and over, and was careful when asked his age to say he was in his sixteenth year. His brothers were two years younger. When Harry was asked how old he was he said he was as old as Bill, and when any one inquired his age of Bill he replied that he was as old as Harry. This was because being twins they got somehow mixed up when they were born, and no one knew which was ten minutes the older.



A VENTURE IN 1777

Between themselves the twins considered the matter of precedence based on age as important, and now and then endeavored to adjust matters by wager of battle. It was settled at last by the elder brother, Tom, who decided that they should be elder year about. Thus, in 1777 Bill was the older, and was sadly regarding the lapse into youth which was about to come in 1778, when Harry would be in turn the senior.



While Tom, who was to be sixteen in February, looked older, his brothers appeared younger than their years, and were two saucy, clever, reckless lads. A look of childlike innocence was part of the

protective capital the twins invested in mischief. They fought one another, made common cause against the world, and had, as concerned Tom, a certain amount of respect founded on physical conditions.

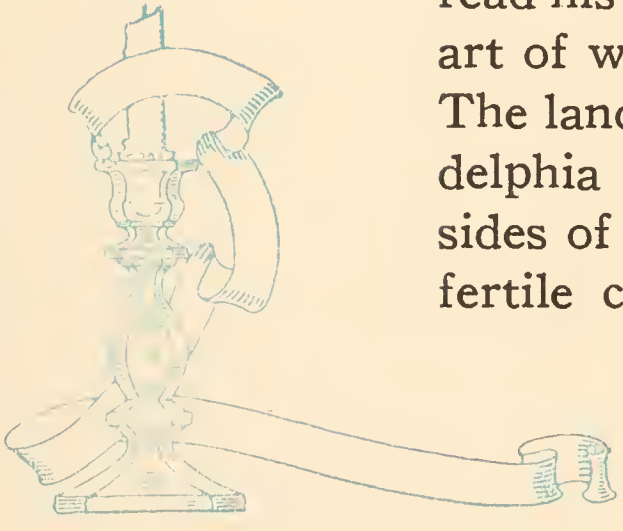
At the close of this year 1777, Sir William Howe held the city of Penn with some eighteen thousand men. Twenty miles away George Washington waited in his lines at Valley Forge with three or four thousand half-starved soldiers.

Between the two armies Nature had established a nearly neutral ground, for on it lay the deepest snow the land had known for many a year. It was both foe and friend to the Continental soldiers, whom

starvation and cold were daily tempting to desertion, and among whom disease in many forms was busily recruiting for the army of the dead.

The well-fed British regulars in and near the city found in the snow an obstacle which forbade Sir William Howe to move, discouraged enterprise and gave excuses for inertness, since no general at that time ventured to think of a winter campaign, until in '78 the Virginia general read his enemy a novel lesson in the art of war.

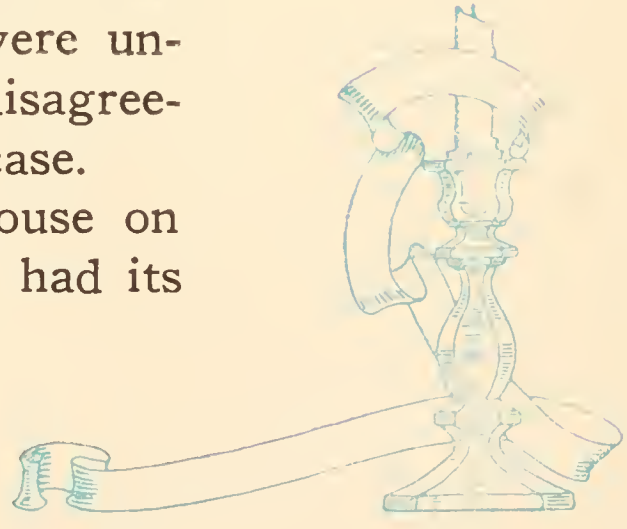
The land between the city of Philadelphia and Valley Forge on both sides of the Schuylkill was in '77 a fertile country of large farms, to



which narrow wood roads led from the main highways. On to this region of winter scouting or foraging parties of both armies ventured at times, and from it in good weather the farmers, despite the efforts of our scant cavalry, took supplies to the snow-beleaguered city, and sometimes, if Tories, information of value.

In the best houses of the city there were quartered, to the disgust of the Whig dames, a great number of British officers. They were to be fed without charge and were unpleasant or not personally disagreeable, as chanced to be the case.

Mrs. Markham's ample house on Third Street, near Spruce, had its

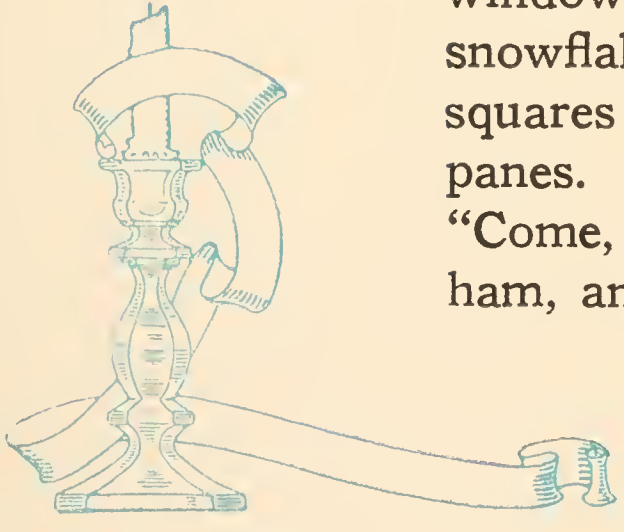


share of boarders thus comfortably billeted, to the satisfaction of her Tory neighbors who were not thus burdened or who gladly entertained officers of distinction.

The owner of the house, Colonel Markham, of the Continental line, lay a prisoner in New York, when on Christmas Eve, in this year of 1777, Mrs. Markham and three unwelcome guests sat down to supper.

Tom, the elder son, stood at the window watching the big white snowflakes flitting across the black squares of the night-darkened panes.

"Come, my son," said Mrs. Markham, and he took the vacant seat,



his mind on the joys to which the weather was contributing in the way of coasting, skating and snow-ball wars.

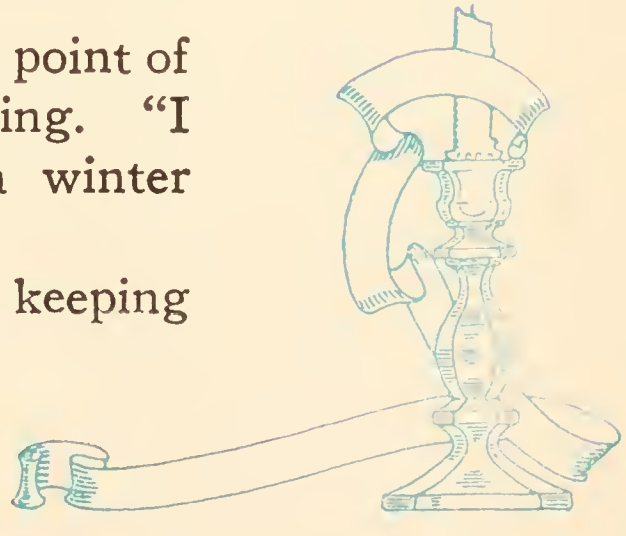
This terrible winter was one thing to Sir William Howe, another to George Washington, and a quite delightful other to Tom Markham.

"I suppose, Tom," said the mother, as he took his seat, "this sort of Christmas weather is much to your liking."

"Why, any fellow would like it, mother."

"There is everything in the point of view," she returned, smiling. "I have no recollection of a winter like this."

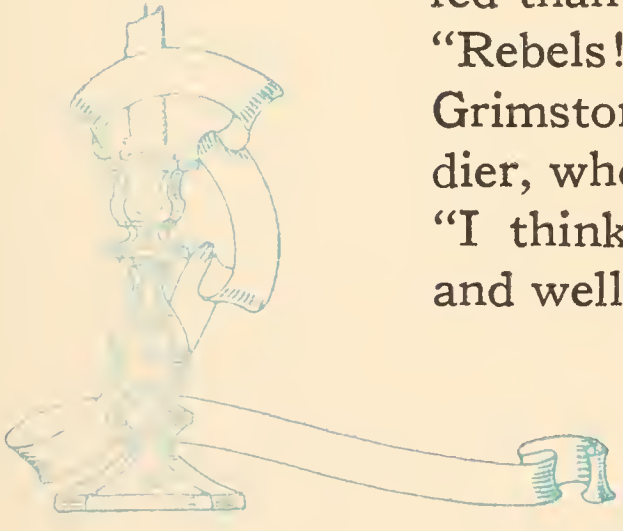
In truth, the weather was keeping



Christmas with a bountiful gift of fresh snow to the earth which was already heavily burdened.

Within the house a cheerful wood fire blazed on the hearth. Two branched silver candelabra lighted the table, and the furniture, portraits and round mirrors all told of ease and luxury.

"I have to thank you for the turkey, Captain Verney," said Mrs. Markham. "My supplies are running low and soon you will be no better fed than the Continentals."



"Rebels! madam," said Colonel Grimstone, a rough, red-faced soldier, who had risen from the ranks. "I think we shall have to be fed and well fed, too. I have asked five

officers to dine here next week, on New Year's Day."

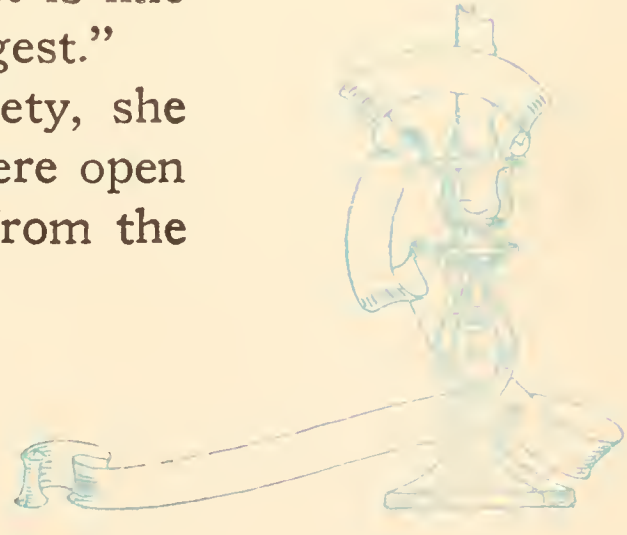
Tom looked straight at the fat Colonel and wished he were himself a man.

"By that time," said Mrs. Markham, laughing, "you will have little besides pork and potatoes; Heaven knows what else."

"Oh, you will find us enough. All you rebel ladies tell the same story. A bit tough, this mutton."

For the first time she broke into angry reply. "Then, sir, it is like your manners—hard to digest."

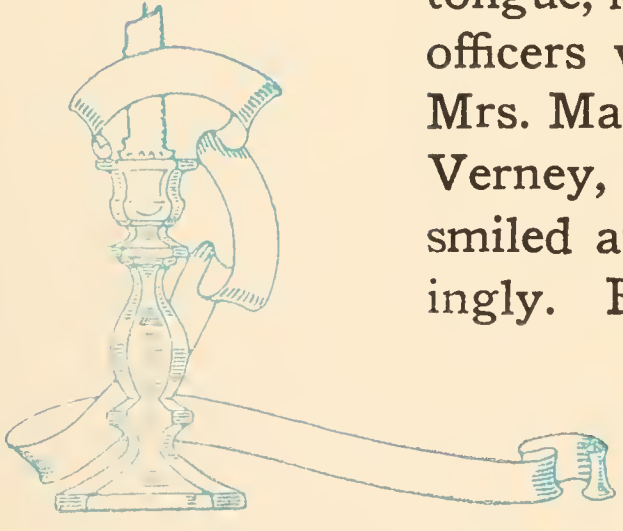
What with care and anxiety, she had come to the place where open wrath is the only escape from the shame of tears.



To her surprise the Colonel made no rejoinder. The younger officer at his side caught his eye as he was about to make some insolent reply. Captain the Honorable John Verney, to be some day in the peerage if spared by war, was a person whom the Colonel did not care to offend, and who, as Mrs. Markham spoke, said, "You had better get another billet, Grimstone. No doubt Andre would exchange with you."

The Colonel growled, but held his tongue, knowing very well that few officers were as well cared for as Mrs. Markham's guests.

Verney, a gentleman of the best, smiled at her and nodded reassuringly. He meant, as often before,



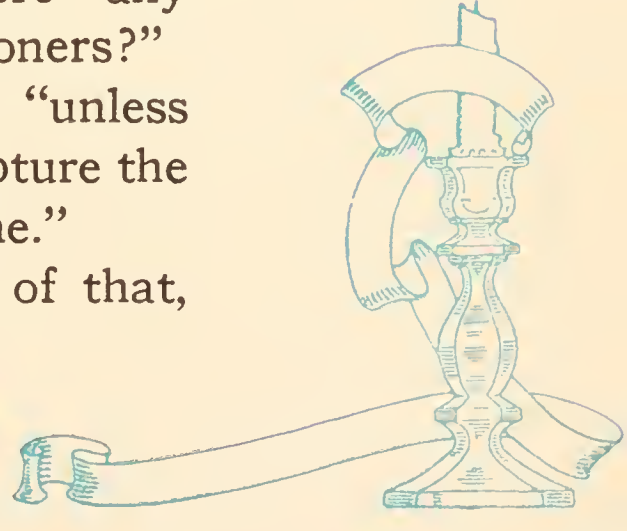
to set her at ease as to her difficulty in suiting the Colonel.

The third guest, a Hessian officer, Count Von Einstein, annoyed by the Colonel's rudeness, turned the talk aside as he said, in fair English, "The letter you gave me for your husband in New York I was able to forward, but I had first to go through the form of reading it. I think I did say so; else it could not have gone."

"Of course," returned Mrs. Markham, coloring. "Is there any chance of exchange of prisoners?"

"I fear not," said Verney, "unless the Continentals should capture the Count or Colonel Grimstone."

"There isn't much chance of that,

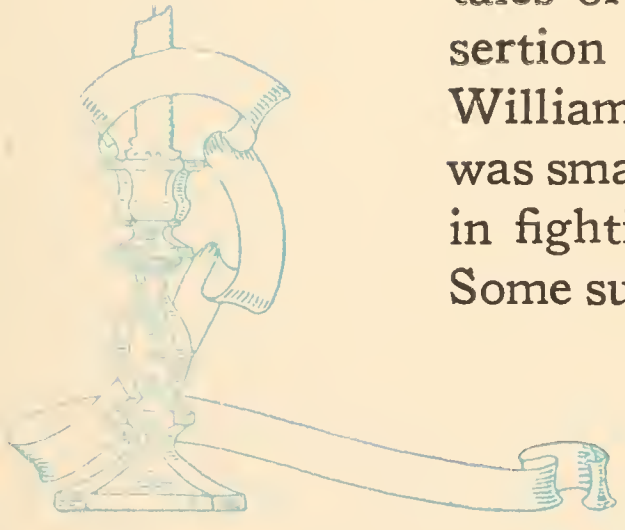


mother," whispered Tom. "They like town too well."

"Hush!" she said, but smiled at him affectionately. Amid the stress of war, the talk at table, and his mother's anxiety, the lad had become thoughtful beyond his years.

"What a terrible night!" said Mrs. Markham, as the wind roared around the house and the casements rattled. Her mind was on the camp at Valley Forge, whence came, from the Quaker farmers, now and then, tales of starvation, misery and desertion very encouraging to Sir William Howe, who felt that there was small need to assist the weather in fighting his battles.

Some such thought was in the mind



of the Colonel, for he remarked, "The rebels must be enjoying it."

"There are two sides to that question," replied Verney.

"How two, sir?" asked Grimstone.

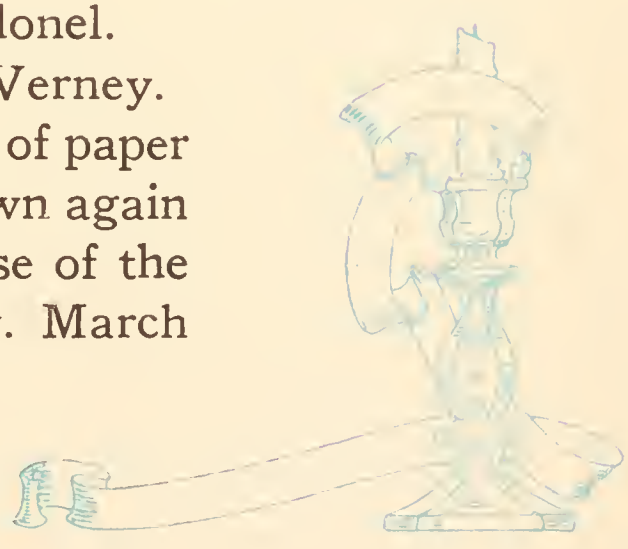
"Oh, we cannot move," said the Count. "Not even the great Frederick ever made a campaign in winter."

"Who wants to move? I do not," growled the Colonel.

"I would try it, if I were Sir William."

"And how?" asked the Colonel.

"Well, this way," said Verney. He rose, and taking a sheet of paper from a desk near by sat down again and rapidly drew the course of the river Schuylkill. "This way. March



five thousand men up each side of the river, cross on the ice from this side, and attack on both sides at once."

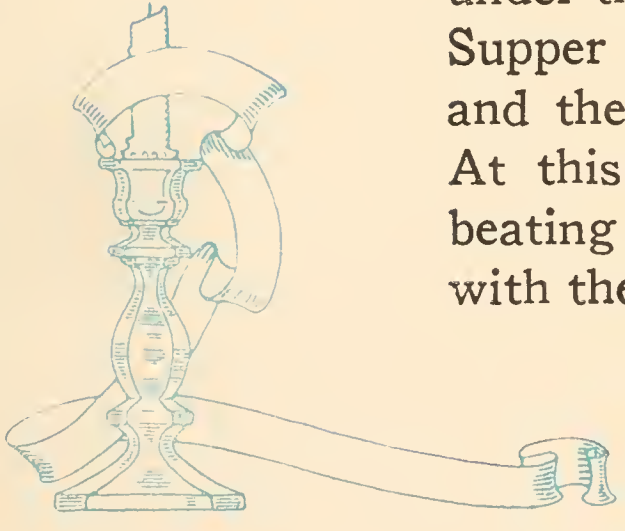
The Count looked up. "That is just what Major Montresor is urging Sir William to do, and at once. He hesitates——"

"But the snow," said the Colonel.

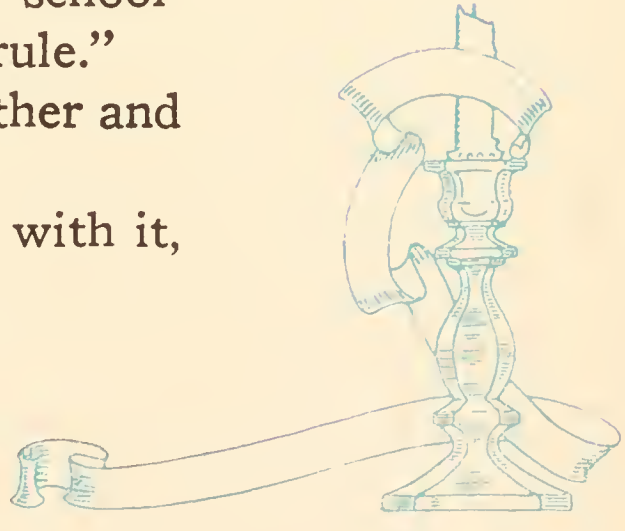
"He won't try it," returned Verney.

"No, thank Heaven," said the Colonel, and the sketch was crumpled up and cast aside to fall on the floor under the table.

Supper was over, the table cleared, and the men sat talking together. At this time broke in the twins, beating off the snow and pounding with their cold feet on the floor.



"I have a sword," and "I have a drum," cried the twins.
"Goodness, you little rebels! I shall run," laughed Verney.
"And I," cried the Count.
"You are late, boys," said Mrs. Markham.
"Aunt Mary kept us."
"Did you put away the lantern?"
"No, mother," said Bill.
"Why not? I told you to be careful of it. What mischief have you been up to? I shall be easier when the holidays are over and the schoolmaster is busy with his ferrule."
The twins looked at each other and were silent.
"Come," said Verney, "out with it, boys."



"You're the oldest, Harry," said Bill.

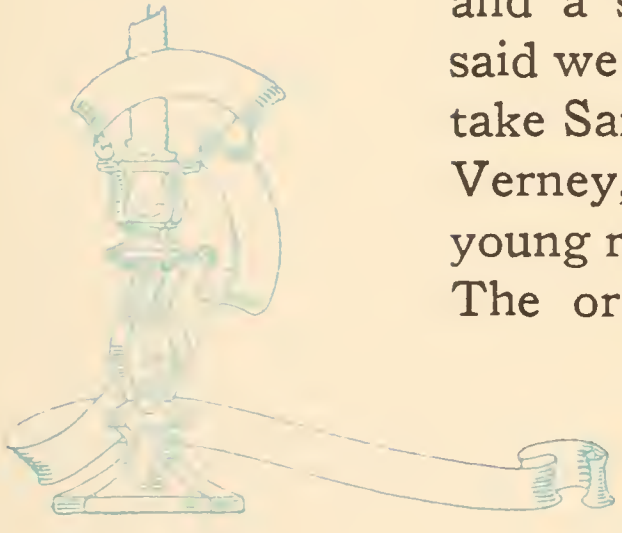
"Out with it, Gemini," said Verney.

Harry was silent, and it was Bill who replied.

"Well, Sambo—that's Aunt Mary's man, sir—he wouldn't let us carry the lantern."

Verney, the sympathetic lover of all their mischief, asked, "What then, Bill?"

"We kicked his shins and he dropped the lantern and it went out, and a soldier came along and he said we had no lantern and he must take Sambo to the guard-house."



Verney, much amused, said: "You young rebels are always in mischief. The orders of Mr. Galloway are

that every one after dark must carry a lantern."

"Well, we wanted to carry it."

"What did Sambo say?"

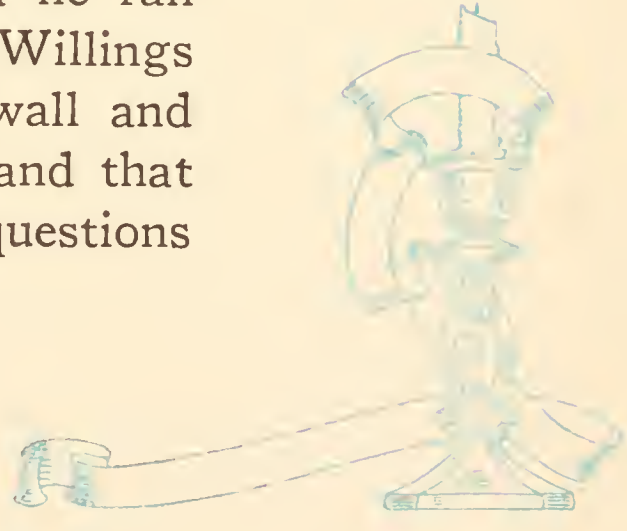
"He ran away when the soldier said he had no light. Then we ran, too, like everything."

"And was that all?" The twins hesitated. "Oh, don't be afraid," cried Verney. "What next?"

"We hurrahed for Washington and snowballed him."

"What, Washington?"

"No, sir, the soldier; and he ran after us, and we ran down Willings Alley and got over the wall and then over our own wall, and that soldier-man he is asking questions of Mr. Willing's cook."



Tom grinned approval, the Count looked serious and Verney laughed, while the Colonel said, "I have a mind to spank both of you."

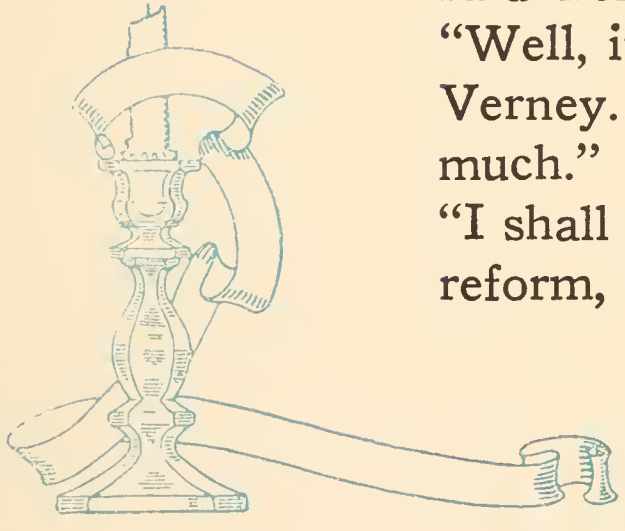
Mrs. Markham turned on him. "I can attend to those ceremonies myself, sir"—a fact of which the twins were well aware.

The Colonel made no reply, but Verney said: "In the interest of patriotism, madam, you cannot possibly court-martial them."

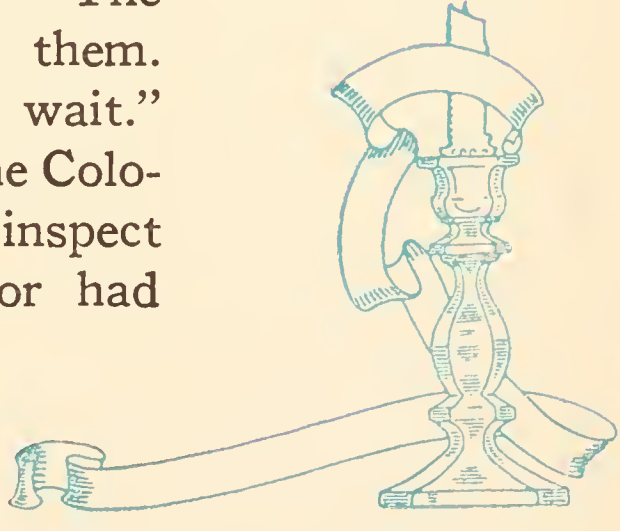
"And it is Christmas Eve, mother," said Tom.

"Well, it is largely your fault, Mr. Verney. You spoil them too much."

"I shall reform, madam. We shall reform, Gemini."



"To bed with you, lads," she said.
"Couldn't we sit up a little?" said Verney.
"Please, madam," urged the Count.
"Then half an hour. Come to the fire. Lie down on the rug, boys. Why, your hands are half-frozen."
The Count and Verney drew to the hearth and the Colonel sat at the table. He was quite outside of the group around the fire.
"You have been so good," said Verney, "that I shall have some little presents for you to-morrow." The twins wished to hear of them. "No," he said, "you must wait." But in the morning he and the Colonel had to go out to inspect the works Major Montresor had



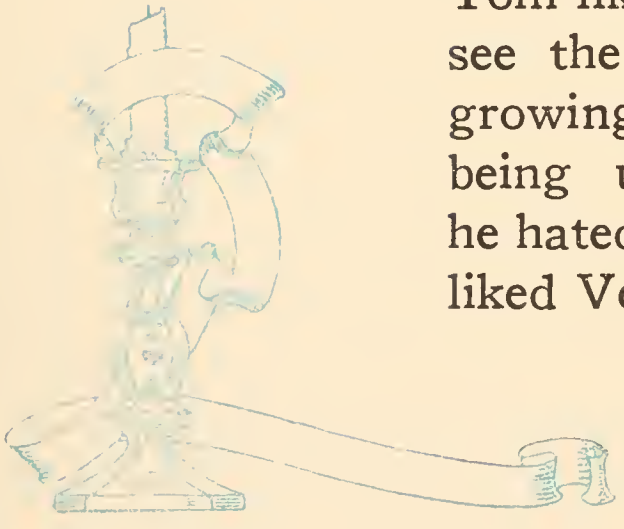
thrown up at Chestnut Hill. They would use their own horses and Mrs. Markham's sleigh, and would their mother let the boys go?

"They are so good," said Verney.

"Oh, do, mother!" cried the twins.

The Colonel at the table growled that children were in the way, nuisances; but Verney took his assent for granted, and somewhat reluctantly the mother yielded, her friend Verney promising to take care of them.

Tom liked very well this chance to see the soldiers, but showed the growing boy's usual appearance of being unenthusiastic. Moreover, he hated the Colonel as much as he liked Verney.



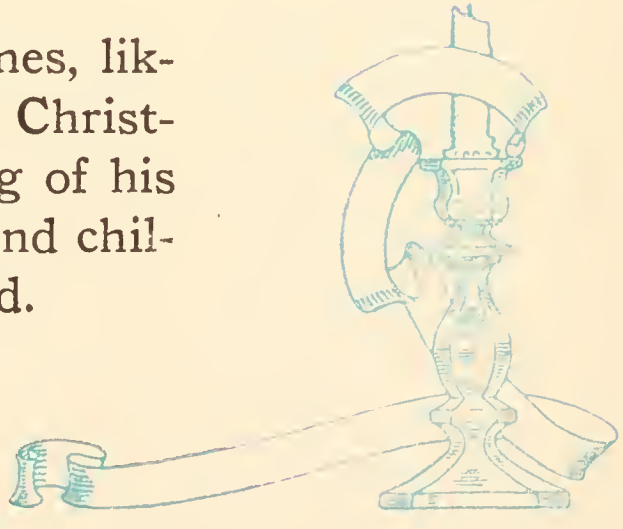
Assured of the frolic, the twins frankly opened the question of Christmas presents with their friendly German guest, Mrs. Markham protesting in vain.

The Count laughed. *"Guter himmel,* children. I have no presents. Ask the Colonel; he might dream you each a pony." The Colonel by this time was sound asleep.

"It's no use," said Harry.

"Not even if he was awake," said Bill. "If you haven't got any presents, tell us a story."

This he had done many times, liking the lads. Now at this Christmas season he was thinking of his distant home and his wife and children, away in the Fatherland.

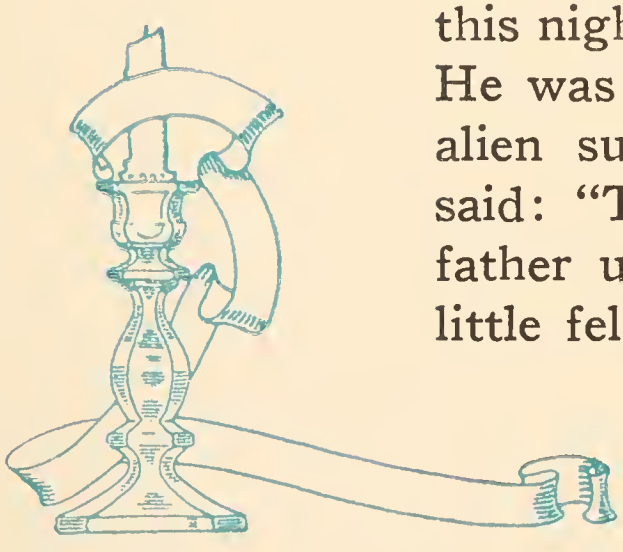


"Come, come, Count," said Verney; "I like stories."

The Count sat still, reflecting.

"He's getting ready," said Harry. "It will be a Christmas story, boys."

"By all means," said Verney, seeing as he spoke the old Devonshire hall —his home, the holly and the mistletoe, and hearing the merriment that seemed to sail to him on fairy ships over three thousand miles of sea. They would drink his health this night.



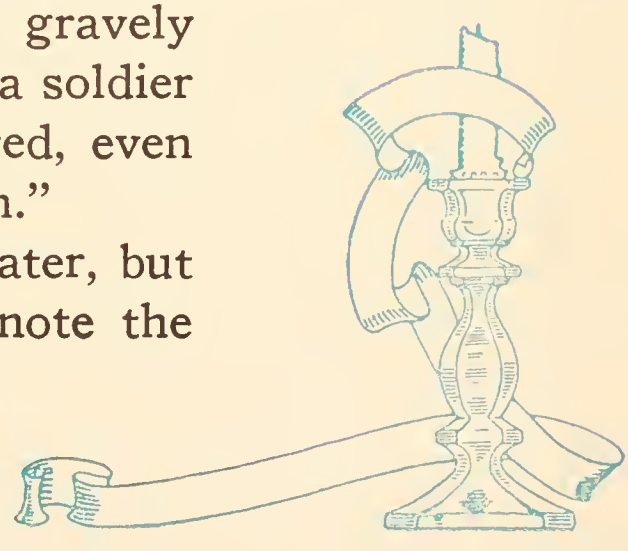
He was recalled to a sense of his alien surroundings as the Count said: "This is a story, boys, my father used to tell when I was a little fellow, but it was never told

except on Christmas Eve, when we sat in the great hall of my own home."

"What made you come away to fight us?" This was Bill's contribution. Harry punched him to emphasize his wish that there should be no interruptions.

Mrs. Markham did not, as usual, reprove the twin whose ingenious capacity to unite impertinence and curiosity was in great need of check. She merely looked up at the Hessian gentleman, who gravely made reply to Bill: "I am a soldier and go where I am ordered, even though it take me to death."

The twins discussed this later, but Tom was old enough to note the



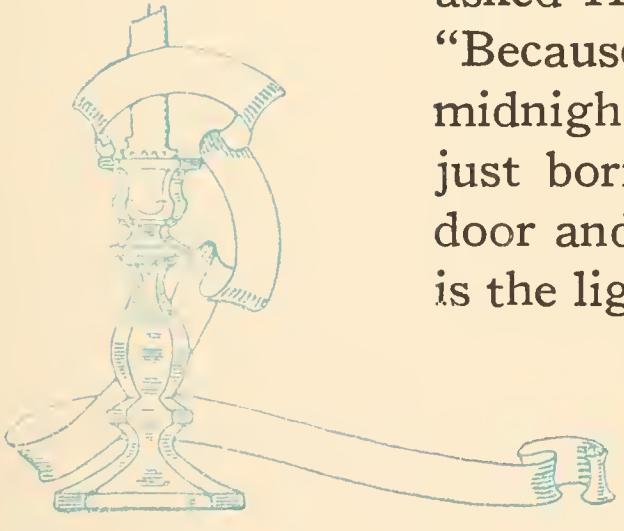
suddenly-serious look of the officer as Mrs. Markham, who knew his history, said: "Be quiet, boys. I want to hear the story, even if you do not."

"But we do," cried the twins.

"When I tell this story I think of the great hall of the castle, with no light but what the big logs gave, and how it flashed red on the armor and on the lances and swords on the walls."

"Why must there be no lights?" asked Harry.

"Because we think in Hesse that at midnight when the blessed day is just born the Christ comes to the door and blesses the home. As He is the light of the world there must



be no other light but the fire for warmth, like the comforting of His love for all, all of us. But now I must not be interrupted."

"If Bill does it again," said the other twin, "I will ——"

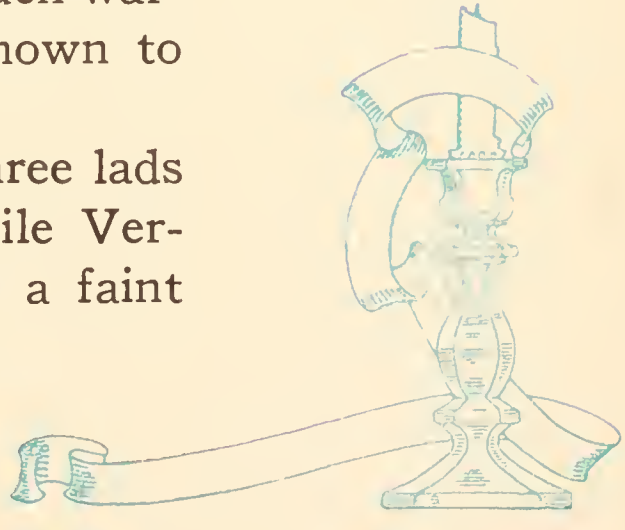
"Just you try," returned Bill.

"I shall thrash you both," said Tom.

"You can't!"

On this the mother said they should all three go to bed if they spoke a word in the next half-hour. Upon this there was silence and only the occasional interchange of such war-like signals as are well known to boys.

The Count went on, the three lads now eagerly attentive, while Verney sat by giving at need a faint

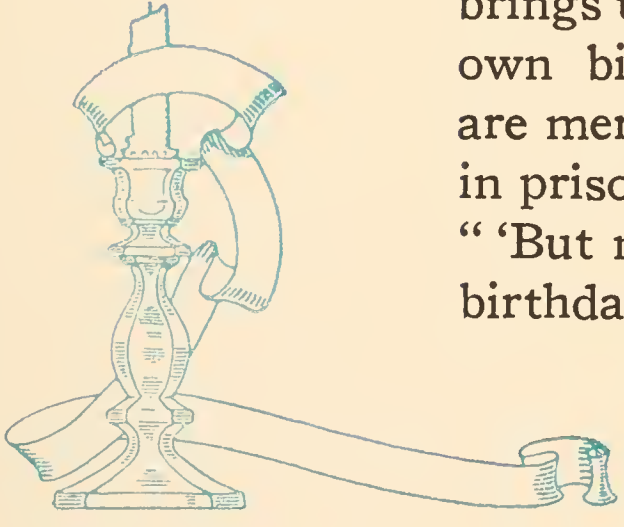


whistle to check or lower the fine snoring of the Colonel.

"Once upon a time in old days there was a King, and the time it was once upon was Christmas Eve. Then, as was the custom, Rathumus, the maker of stories for the King, came to him and said, 'Come with me that under the stars I tell you the Christmas tale.' The King went with him into the garden.

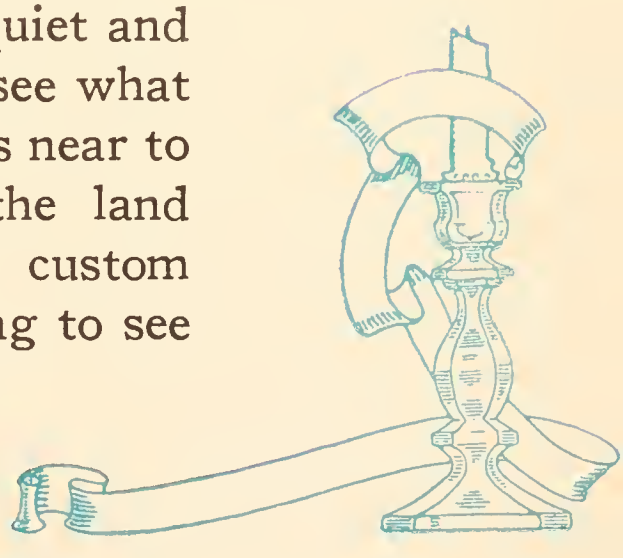
" 'This,' said the teller of tales, 'O King, is the night of all nights that brings to men wise counsel for their own birthdays, when Kings who are merciful set free many who are in prison for debt.

" 'But now in this kingdom on the birthday of the Christ, the King of



Kings, a hundred couriers sit on their horses at the gate waiting for a message of pardon and release to all who are in prisons for wrong-doing or for having displeased my lord the King. This is the law of the land. But if the King in his wrath has one he will not set free, then none are released, and the couriers ride sad to the homes of those who bide in sorrow.'

"On this the maker of stories went away and the King stayed alone in the garden. It was very quiet and the stars watched him to see what would come, for now it was near to midnight, and over all the land many who knew of the custom stood at their doors longing to see

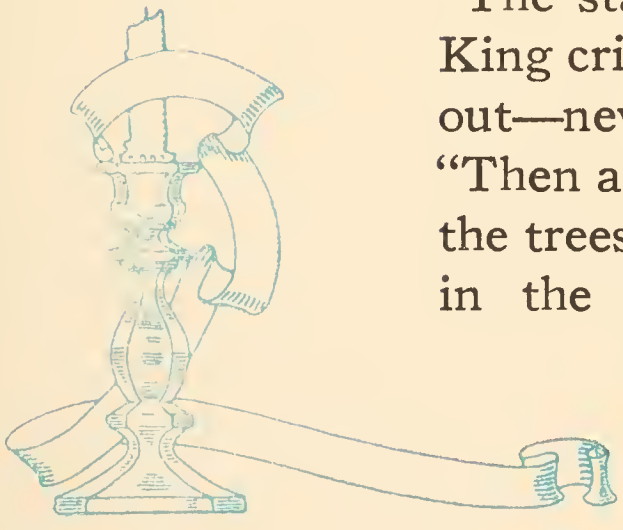


the white-robed couriers arrive with news of pardon on that Christmas Day.

"Now there is always for every man some woman of whom he is afraid, and so it was with the King. It was not the Queen, because she was dead, but it was the King's daughter, who wanted to marry a brave young Prince, and was angry because the King saw no way to prevent it except to keep him shut up in a high tower.

"The stars all felt sorry when the King cried out, 'Never will I let him out—never!'

"Then a little wind sobbed through the trees and was still and the roses in the shadows prayed and the



nightingales ceased to sing. There was a great quietness.

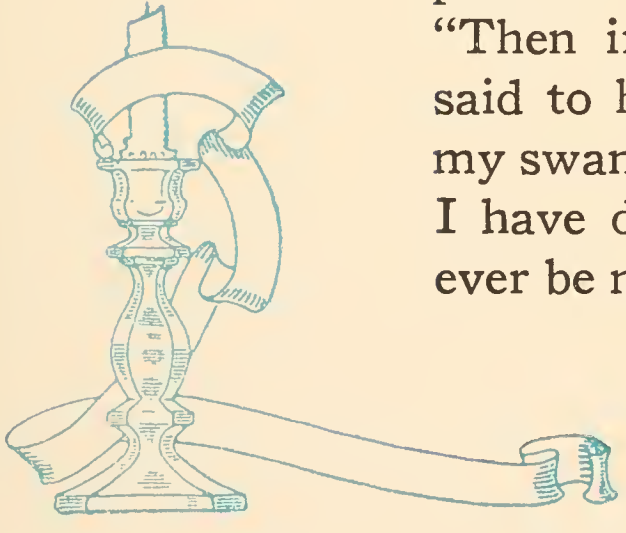
"The King sat down on a seat and was angry with the custom and with himself, and shut his eyes and thought, for now he must decide. If he would not set free the Prince there would be no Christmas prayers for him in all the wide land. But no, he would not free the Prince.

"Of a sudden he heard a voice say softly: 'If, O King, you move you will surely die. Listen!' Then he looked and saw in the darkness a dim figure with great white wings and was afraid, and as he listened he heard: 'O King, around the throne of God a million courier

angels are waiting in prayer. And at the noon of night the Christ will speak, and they will fly to set loose from chains of sin those who have this year offended a greater King than you. Hark, the clock strikes! They are on their way to open for you and many the prison doors of cruelty and wrongdoing.'

"Of a sudden the angel was gone and the nightingales sang again, while the King went to the gate and cried to the couriers, 'Go, with my pardon.'

"Then in the palace the Princess said to her ladies: 'Quick, take off my swan wings and never tell what I have done, or none of you shall ever be married.'



"Very soon came the King, and said, 'I have seen an angel!'

"And so the Prince was set free and married that clever Princess and was ever after good and happy."

* * *

"What a pretty tale!" said Mrs. Markham; "and now to bed, to bed, boys."

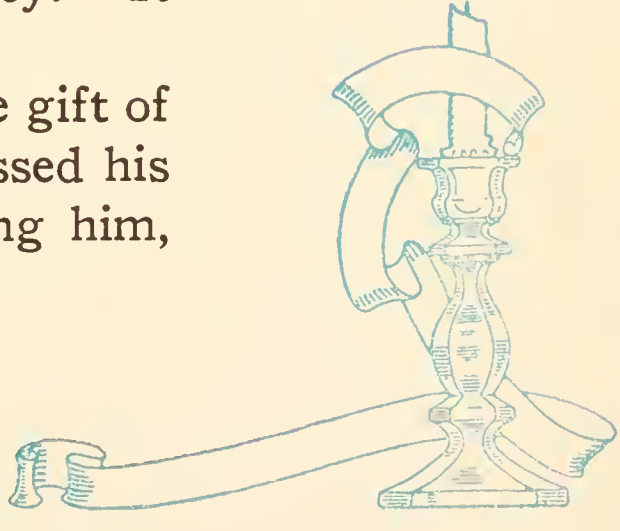
"Thank you, sir,' said Tom.

Bill was silent.

"Then it wasn't a real angel," said Harry.

"Yes, it was," laughed Verney. "It was a woman."

On this Harry, who had the gift of imagination, got up and kissed his mother, who, comprehending him, smiled.



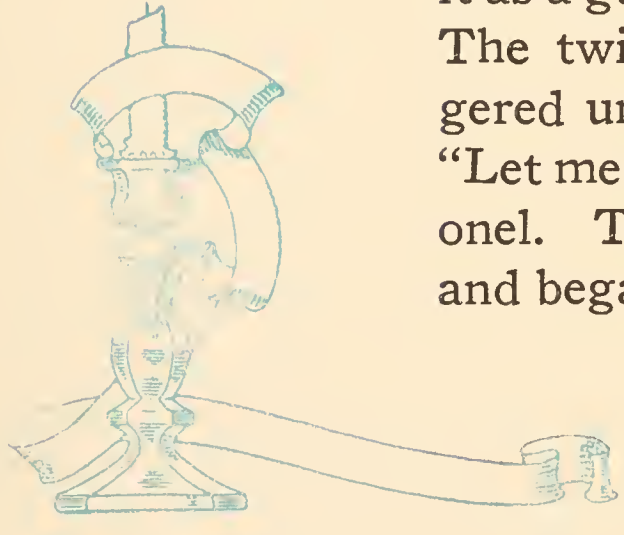
Just as they were going noisily to bed a servant came in and said an orderly was without. He gave a paper to Verney, who awakened the Colonel and gave him a letter.

The Colonel rubbed his eyes and looked at it. "I hoped they had forgotten. Here are our orders to inspect the lines to-morrow on Mount Airy and Chestnut Hill."

"And here," said Verney, "is Montresor's map of the forts in and about the city. He promised me to send it as a guide to the outlying works."

The twins having gone, Tom lingered unnoticed.

"Let me see that map," said the Colonel. They spread it on the table and began to consider it.



"May I look?" asked Tom, as usual, curious.

"Certainly," said Verney. "I will explain it to you. See, here are bastions and these dots the cannon. Here is the ***tête du pont,*** a work to defend the upper ferry."

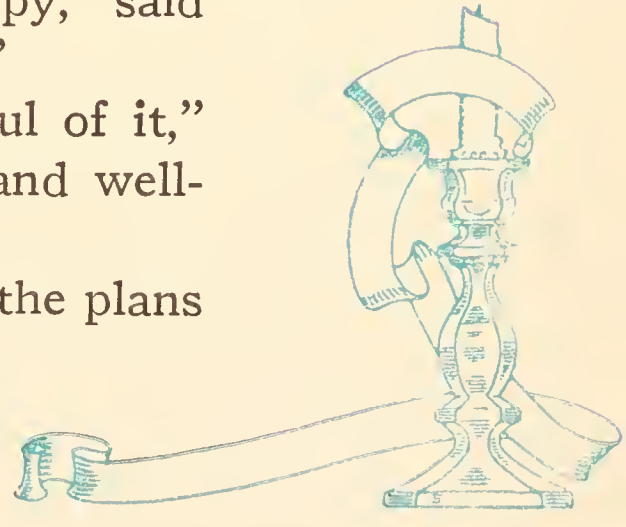
"It is rather droll to me," said Count Einstein. "Eighteen thousand men ought to be bastions enough."

"Not for Sir William," laughed Verney.

"It is Montresor's own copy," said Grimstone. "It is signed."

"I should be pretty careful of it," said the Count, a brave and well-trained soldier.

This readiness to explain the plans



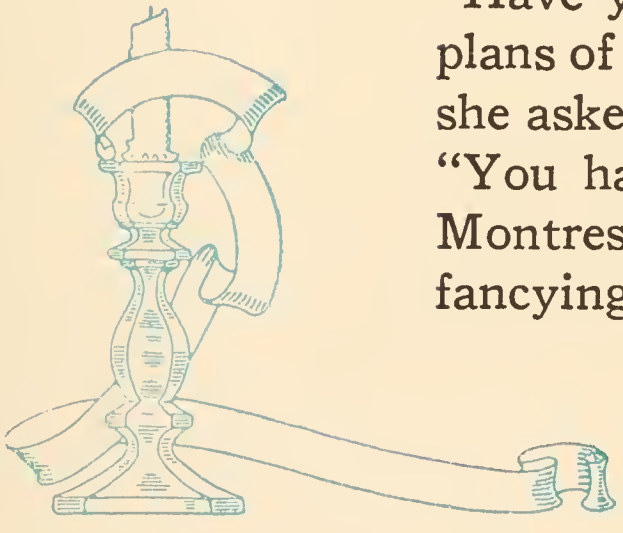
to Mrs. Markham and her interested boy seemed to him unwise. More than once full knowledge of contemplated army movements had in some mysterious way reached the snowbound enemy.

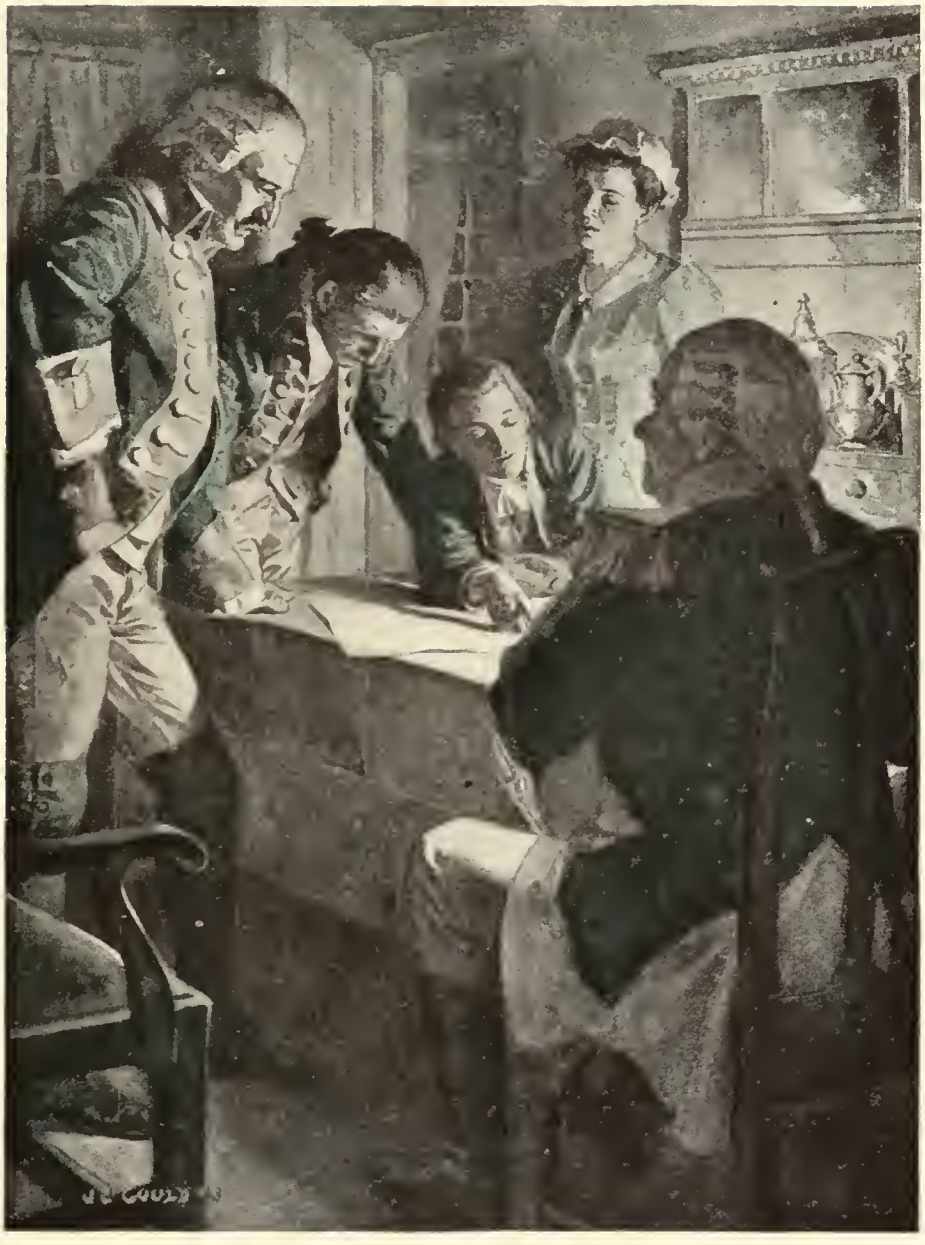
Mrs. Markham stood by looking over Tom's shoulder, and presently said, "It is quite incomprehensible to me. Do you understand it, Tom?"

"I think so. See, mother, in one place he marks a weak point."

"Have you, Mr. Verney, any such plans of the lines at Valley Forge?" she asked gayly.

"You had better inquire of Major Montresor," said the Count, not fancying the too-free talk.





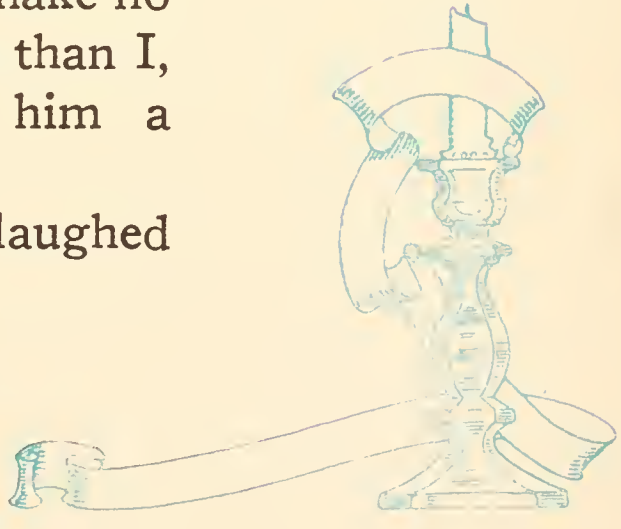
"See, mother, in one place he marks a weak point"

"To exchange plans would simplify matters," said Mrs. Markham, from whom it is to be feared the twins inherited their capacity for mischief.

The Count, much the ablest of the three officers, looked up at her of a sudden grave. Tom, always on easy terms with Verney, went on eagerly asking intelligent questions.

"It is time, my son, you went to bed," said the mother. "If George Washington, Count, could make no more of that tangle of lines than I, you might safely make him a Christmas gift of it."

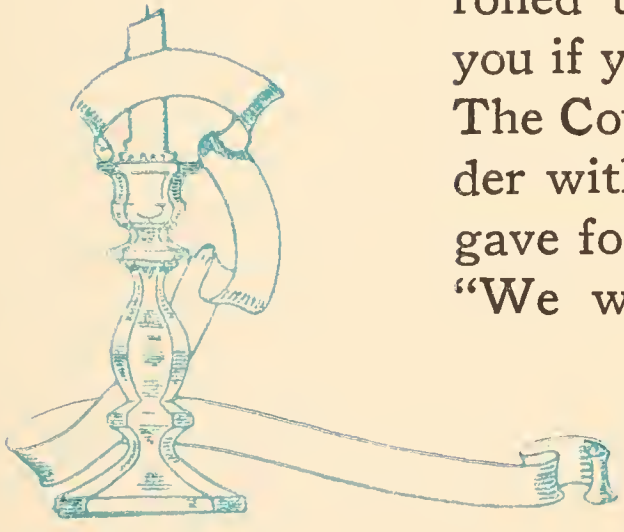
"Let him come and get it," laughed Verney.



"They are pretty poor with their Continental rag money," growled Grimstone, "but I suppose that map would easily fetch——"

"Fetch!" broke in the Count, still less relishing the talk. "It wouldn't fetch five shillings." There was an unusually sharp note in his voice. "Roll it up, Verney."

He was the senior officer present, and Verney, at once recognizing the implied rebuke as something like an order, took the hint, saying, as he rolled the map, "I wanted to ask you if you thought——"



The Count put a hand on his shoulder with the slight pressure which gave force to his words as he said: "We will talk of it, sir, another

time. Permit me to say that if I were you I should be careful of that map." This was in an aside to Verney as the boy left them.

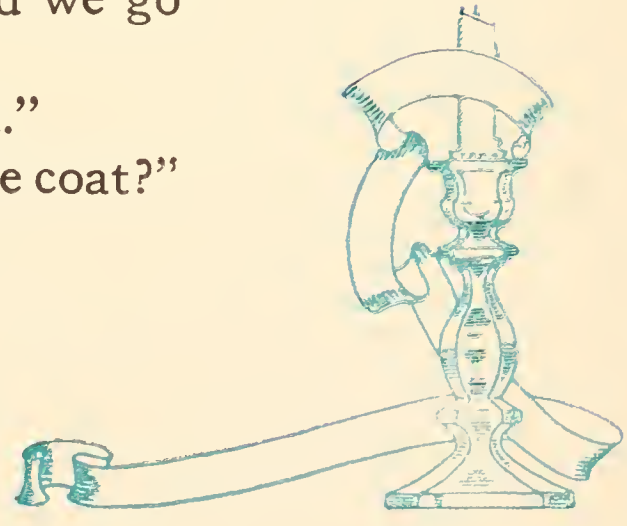
Among them they had set the adventurous mind of a fearless young rebel to thinking in a fashion of which they little dreamed.

"I shall be careful, sir," and then with his gay manner and the self-confidence of youth, he added: "What with the Gemini and Tom and the Colonel, it ought to be safe enough. What time should we go to-morrow, Colonel?"

"Nine will be early enough."

"Will you lend me your sable coat?" asked Verney of the Count.

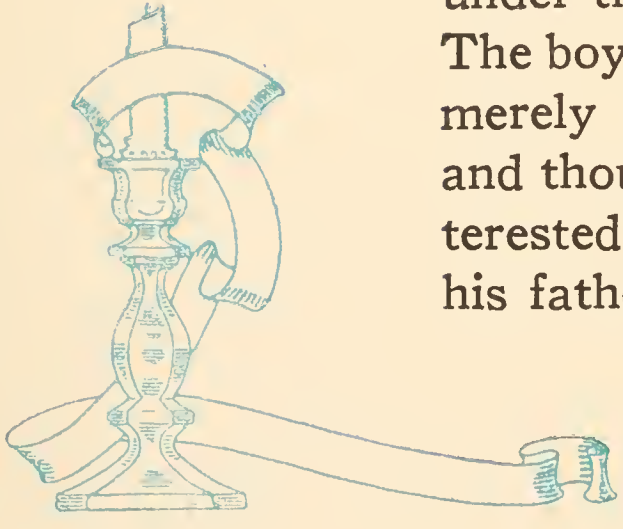
"With pleasure."



"I like best my sealskin," said Grimstone. "It is not so heavy. Do you really mean to take the boys?"

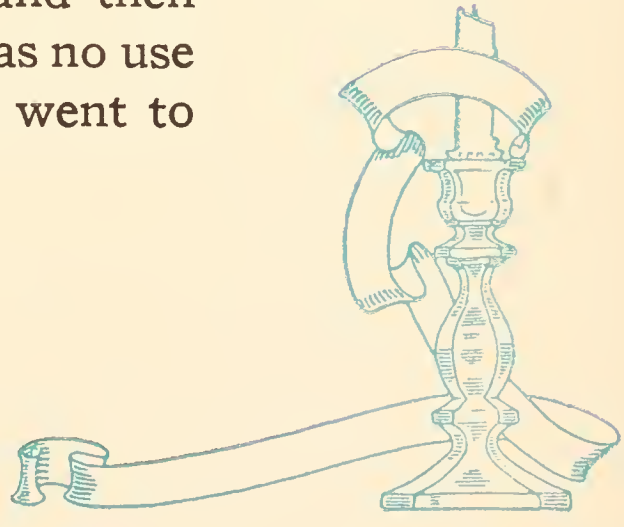
"Of course I do. We want Tom to hold the horses while we tramp about, and the Gemini must have the frolic. I promised."

Tom listened, well pleased. He paused on his way to bed, and while the officers were studying Major Montresor's elaborate map, he pocketed the rough sketch of attack Verney had crumpled up and cast under the table.



The boy was by this time more than merely curious. Being intelligent and thoughtful, all this war talk interested him, and now for two years his father's letters while in service

and the constant discussion he heard had rendered familiar the movements of the two armies and the changing fortunes of the war. The great value of the map of Sir William's chief engineer had been made plain to him, and his mother's gay suggestion that it would be a nice Christmas gift to Washington set the lad to planning all manner of wild schemes as he lay abed. He finally gave it up in despair. How could a boy manage to steal a map from a man like Verney and then get to Valley Forge? It was no use to bother about it, and he went to sleep.



CHAPTER II

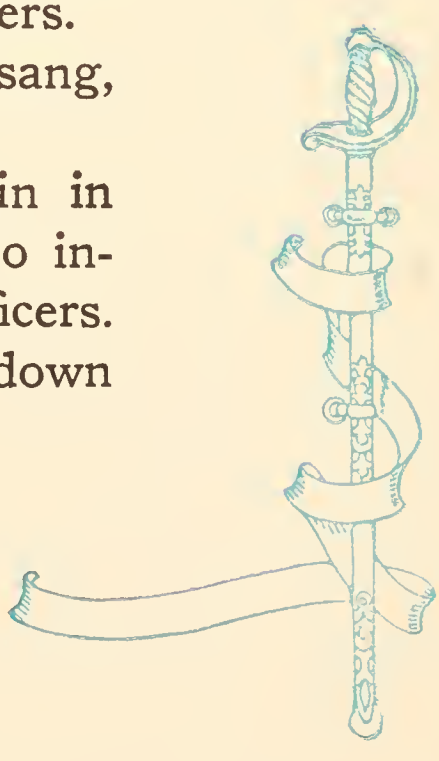
In Which The Venture Is Made

CHAPTER II

THE boys were up early, overjoyed to see a brilliant, sunshiny day. Mrs. Markham provided an ample luncheon, and with Verney and the Colonel in front of the sleigh, and the twins and Tom well muffled up on the back seat, the party sped away, the snow creaking under the runners.

The twins talked, laughed and sang, while Tom sat still, thinking.

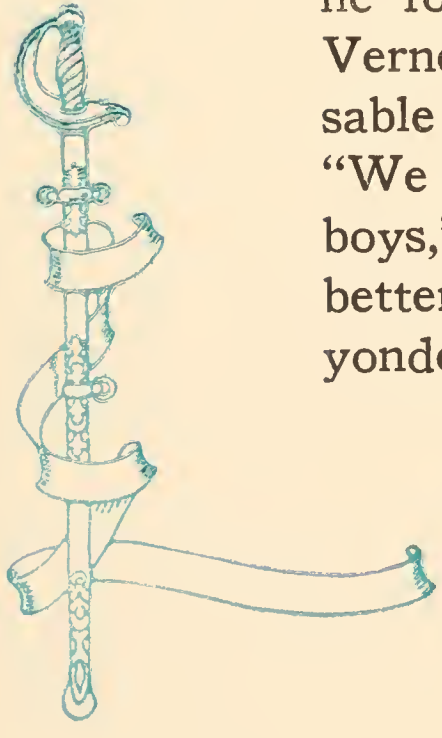
They paused again and again in Germantown and beyond it to inspect positions or to talk to officers. At Chestnut Hill they drove down



the westward slope and finally came upon the farther picket line below the hill. Verney, an engineer officer, thought a field work was needed at this point. Accordingly, the two officers got out, leaving their fur overcoats in the sleigh, as the air was now warmer and they had to tramp some distance through the heavy drifts of snow.

The Colonel put Montresor's map in the pocket of his fur coat, which he folded and laid in the sleigh. Verney also left the Count's rich sable at the feet of the twins.

"We shall be gone half an hour, boys," said Verney. "Had we not better call a corporal from the fire yonder to stand by the horses?"

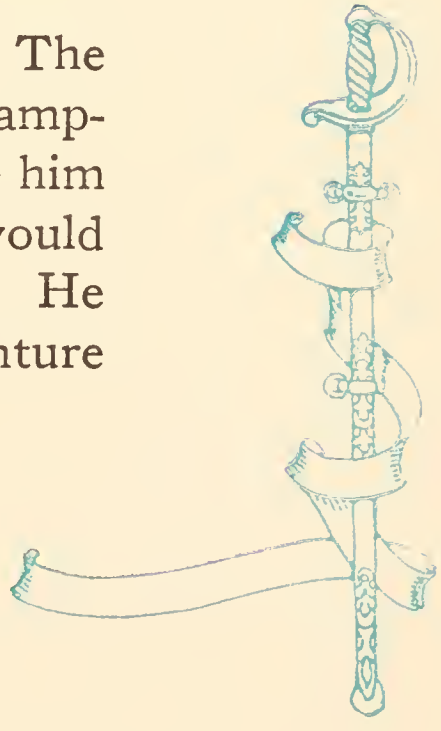


"Lord, man," said Grimstone, "they would stand till night. They are dead tired. Won't you want the map?"

"No," said Verney; "I know it by heart."

About a hundred yards distant was a great camp fire and just ahead of them an outlying picket of two soldiers, one on each side above the road. Tom sat on the front seat, the reins in his hand. Of a sudden a mad idea came into his mind.

The map was in the sleigh. The two officers were far away, tramping through the drifts. Before him lay the lonely highway. He would take the map to Washington. He forgot the peril of the mad venture

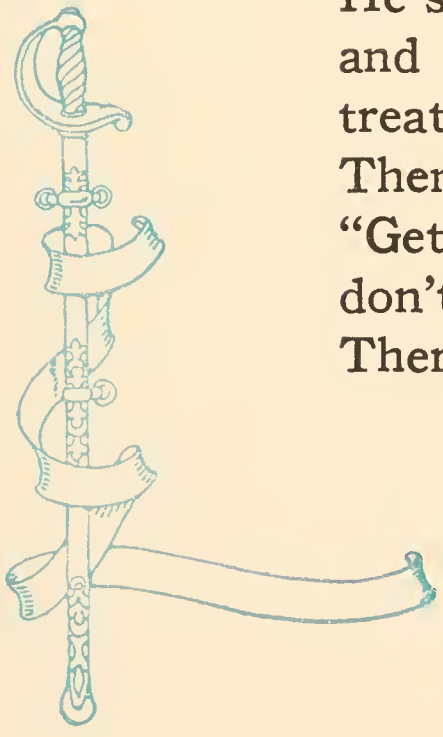


now tempting him, or gave it but a boy's passing thought. His summers had been spent at a farm near White Marsh. He knew the country well. The temptation was too much for him.

A man would have realized the difficulties and the danger for the smaller boys. He did not. A boy's mind is more simple. The risks for himself were merely additional temptations.

He stood up, the reins in his hand, and gazed anxiously after the retreating forms of the two officers. Then he turned to his brothers. "Get over in front, Bill; quick, and don't make a noise."

There was mischief in the air as Bill



at once knew. He climbed over the seat and waited.

"Hold fast, Harry," said Tom. "These horses are going to run away."

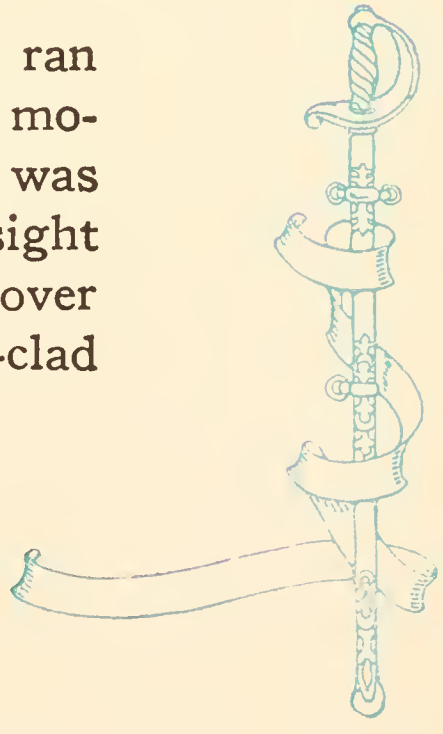
"Oh, let me out," cried Harry.

"No, hold on, and keep quiet."

"What fun!" cried Bill. "We are to have a ride all to ourselves."

"Do you whack the horses, Bill. They'll go. Wait a moment." He gave one last look around him and ahead.

Beyond the picket the road ran straight for a mile. He had his moment of final hesitation, but it was soon over. No one was in sight near by, and his eyes roamed over the trackless vacancy of snow-clad



spaces into which the highway disappeared.

"Are you ready, Bill?" he said, handing him the whip.

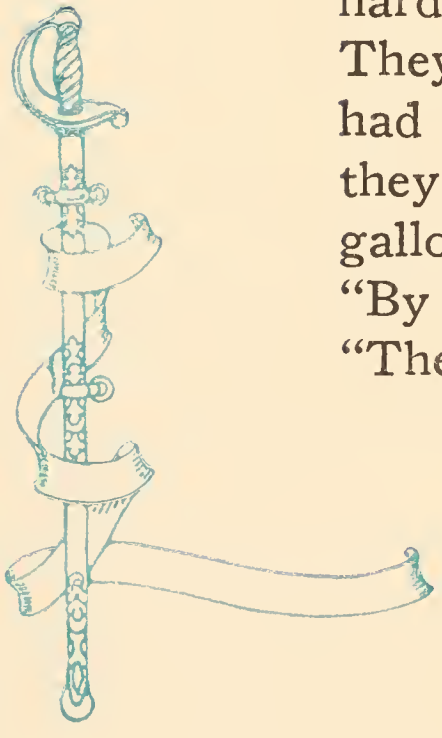
"All right," said Bill, seeing desirable mischief ahead and enjoying the prospect.

Harry was less eager, but, ashamed to confess his fears, said bravely, "Well, Tom, hurry up."

"Now," said Tom, "do you, Bill, hit the horses with the whip, not too hard. They'll go."

They did go, for Bill, enchanted, had to be stopped. In an instant they were off and away at a mad gallop over a much-used road.

"By George!" roared the Colonel. "The horses have run away!"



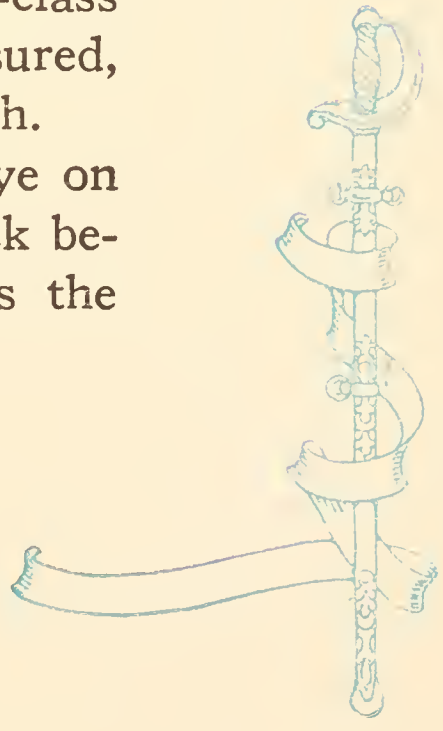
IN AN INSTANT THEY WERE OFF AND AWAY AT A MAD GALLOP

The soldiers shouted, the picket ran down to the road, too late, and furious at this unwonted treatment the horses ran. A mile or more went by before the heavy snowdrifts of a less-used road lessened their speed. On a hillcrest Tom stood up and looked back.

"Guess we are safe, boys," he said. "It's good there were no horses about."

As the sleigh moved more slowly at a trot, Bill said, "It was a first-class runaway!" and Harry, reassured, asked if it wasn't time for lunch.

Tom said no, and kept his eye on the road, which by one o'clock became hard for the horses, as the drifts were heavier.

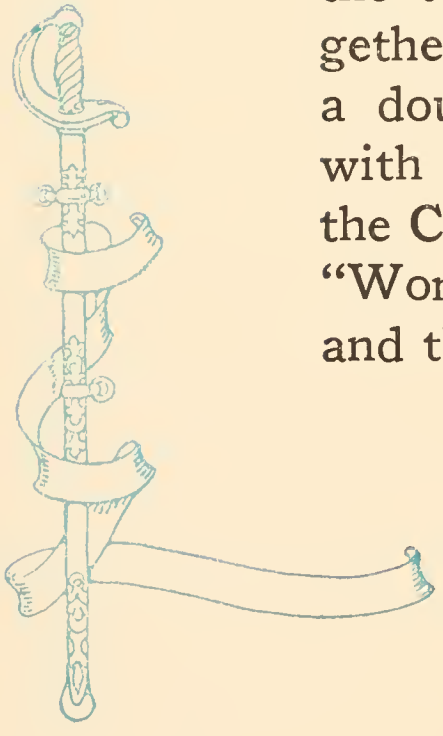


At last he pulled up for luncheon and to rest the team. As the twins were now pretty cold Tom got out the fur coats.

"There are only two," said Harry.

"Oh, I'll fix that," said Tom. And this was his way: He threw the heavy sable coat over the boys' shoulders, and while Harry put his right hand into the right sleeve Bill put his left hand into the left sleeve. When Tom had them buttoned up, the two red faces being close together in the middle, he called them a double-headed bear and roared with laughter as he himself put on the Colonel's coat.

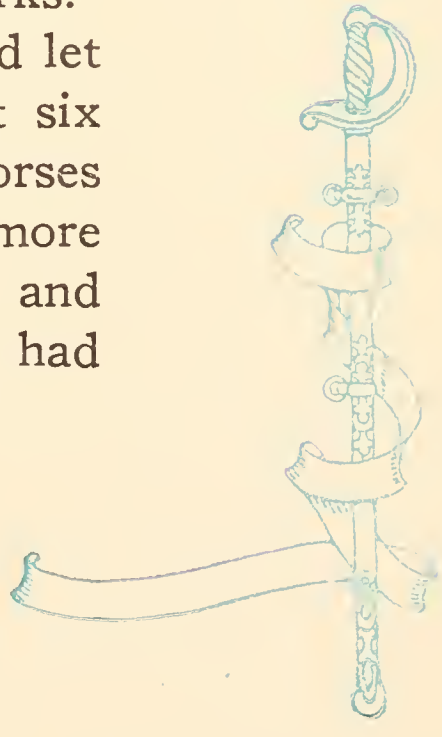
"Won't he say things!" said Bill, and they went on, but now only at



a walk. Harry did not like it, but, ashamed to confess his fears, kept quiet.

They met no one. The distant farms were hidden by the snow-laden forests. The drifts became heavier. Now they were off the road and now on. There were no marks of recent travel. It was Christmas, the farmers at home. Both the twins had become silent, Tom more and more anxious as he missed his well-known landmarks.

At last a dead tree on the road let him know that he was about six miles from the Forge. The horses had come quite nine miles or more through tiring drifts. Now and then their feet balled and Tom had

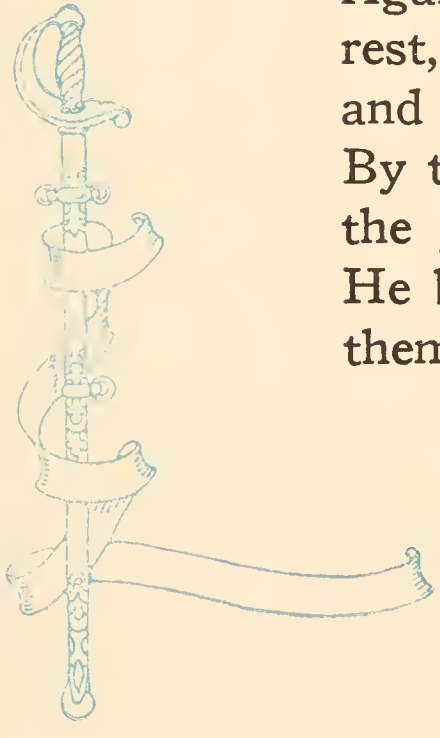


to get down and beat out the packed snow.

Finally the horses could do no more than walk. It was well on to four o'clock, but at this he could only guess. He began to be troubled about the twins and a little to regret having made his venture. If they came to a stop with no house in sight, what could he do? To walk to the camp would be even for him hard and for the twins impossible.

Again he stopped the horses for a rest, a formidable drift lying ahead and filling the road.

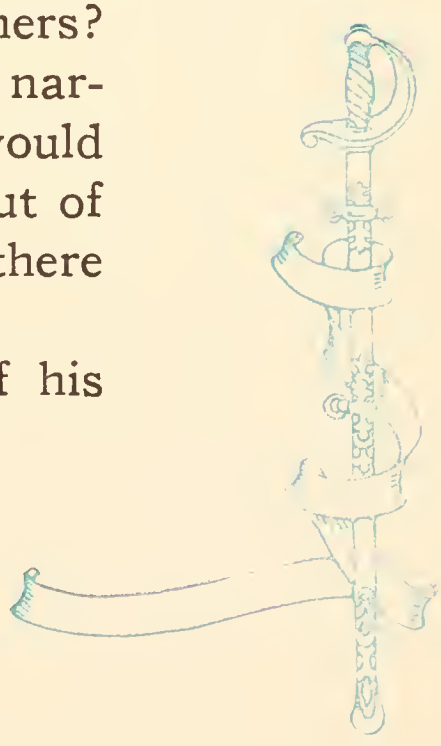
By this time Bill had lost much of the joy of mischievous adventure. He began to think it was time for them to return home, and Harry



had asked over and over how soon they would go back. Tom at length ceased to answer him as it drew toward evening.

There was a new sharpness in the air, a warning to Tom of what night would bring. He stood upon the seat and searched the white-clad land for a house or the wood opening which might lead to one. He saw no sign of habitation to which he could go in person for help. And how could he leave his brothers? Even to turn homeward in the narrow road among the drifts would have been, as he saw, quite out of the question. What else was there but to go on?

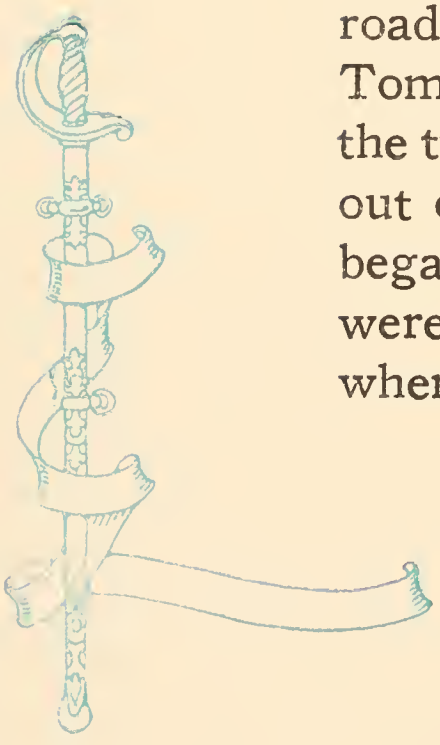
Even at this worst minute of his



daring adventure the boy could have cried at the thought of failure. He felt the map and Verney's sketch under his waistcoat, thought of his father, a prisoner, and then cheering up the twins, used the whip on the weary horses, who plunged into the great mound of snow.

A trace snapped, the sleigh turned over on its side, the horses kicked, broke loose and fled away down the road and were soon lost to view.

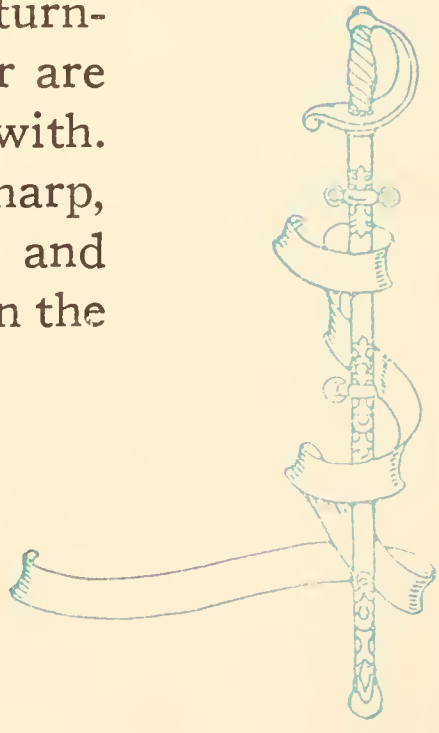
Tom got on his feet and looked for the twins. For a moment they were out of sight. Then the huge drift began to shake and their four legs were seen kicking above the snow, whence Tom pulled out the two-

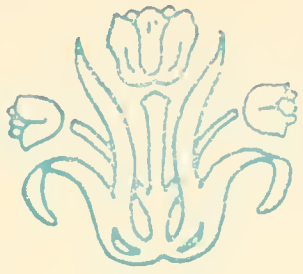


headed bear. Bill laughed. Tom did not. Harry looked his alarm.

All three working hard were able to right the sleigh after beating away a part of the drift. After that they climbed in and ate what was left of the food, but were not quite so merry as before, while Tom, made savage by failure, would neither eat nor talk.

At last he stood up on the seat. "Shut up, Gemini," he said, "I hear something. Now," he said, turning, "mind you, if these I hear are British we were run away with. Hush!" He heard in the sharp, frosty air the clink of sabres and soon the thud of horses' hoofs in the snow.





CHAPTER III

In Which the Venture Succeeds

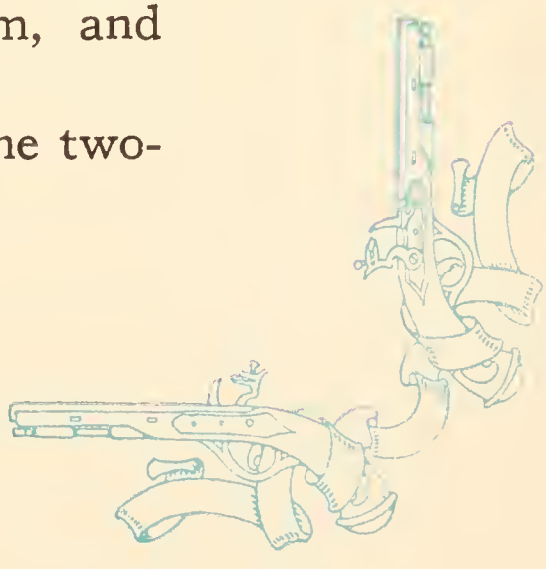
CHAPTER III

A MOMENT after the runaway boys had heard the sound of horses in the snow, a dozen troopers of the Continental army were around them and a young officer rode up, while Harry whimpered and said, "Now we'll be killed."

"Great George!" cried the officer, "but here's a queer capture. Who the deuce are you?"

"I am Tom Markham, sir. My father is Colonel Markham, and these are my brothers."

When Allan McLane saw the two-



headed bear he rocked with laughter as he sat in his saddle.

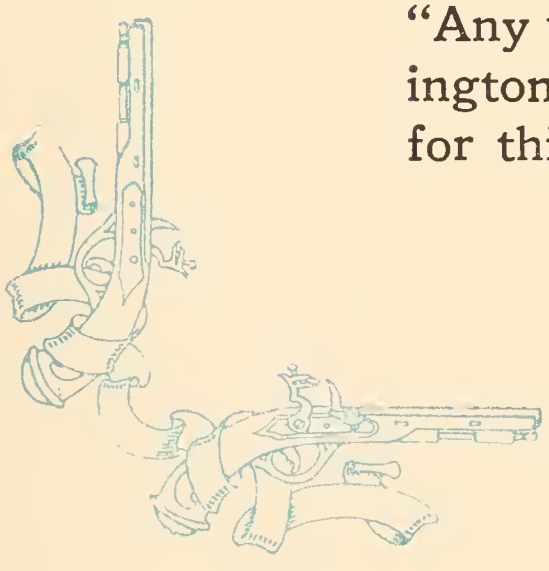
"And how did you get here?"

"We ran away with the horses of Colonel Grimstone and Captain Verney, and, sir, this was why we ran away." As he spoke he pulled out Montresor's map and the sketch.

McLane opened the paper. "By George, it's Montresor's own map. How did you get it?"

"They left it in the sleigh while they went to look at something this side of Chestnut Hill. Is it any use, sir?" added Tom anxiously.

"Any use, man! If General Washington doesn't make you a Colonel for this there is no use in man or



boy trying to serve an ungrateful country."

Then the twins, feeling neglected, said, "We helped, too."

"I licked the horses," cried Bill.

"Aren't you cold, boys?"

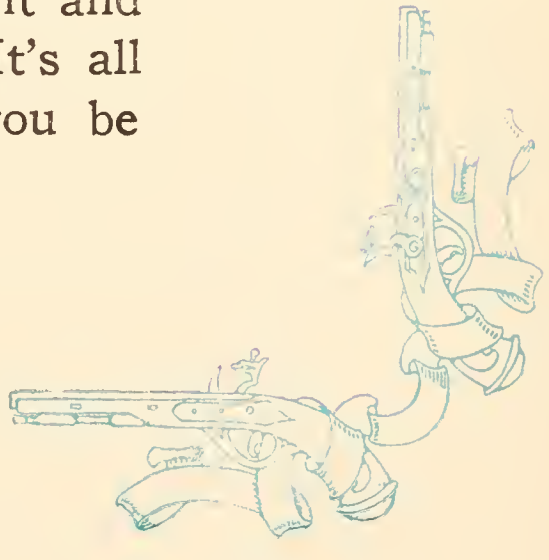
"Yes, sir, but we never told Tom."

"By George, but you are a plucky lad. Take this two-headed animal, Sergeant. Mount one of them, coat and all, in front of you, and be quick, or we shall have them frozen."

"The other may have my coat," said Tom.

"Good," said the Captain. "You shall wear my own cloak, my lad."

Seeing Harry's look of fright and the ready tears, he said: "It's all right, youngsters. Don't you be



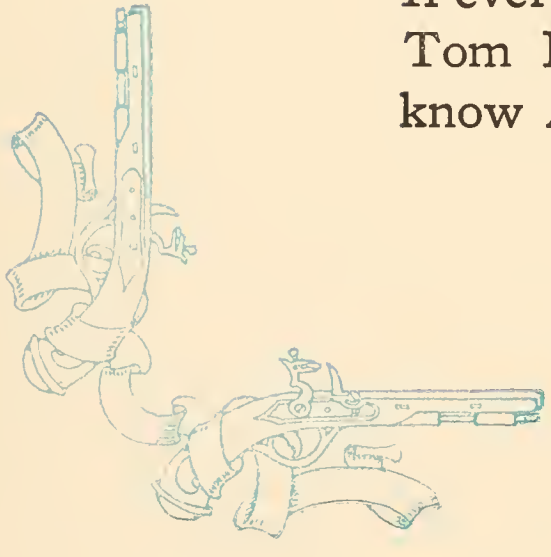
afraid. We are all your friends and I know your father well."

Turning to Tom he said: "This way, my lad. Now then, give him a knee, Sergeant; so, a foot in my stirrup and up you go behind me. Now then, right about, by twos, march."

He went off at a sharp trot with Tom's arms around his waist.

"Hold on to the belt," he said. "May I some day have a boy like you! I enlist you in my troop. You are one of Allan McLane's rangers. Hold hard. The road is better. I am going to gallop."

If ever there was a proud boy it was Tom Markham, for who did not know Allan McLane, the terror of



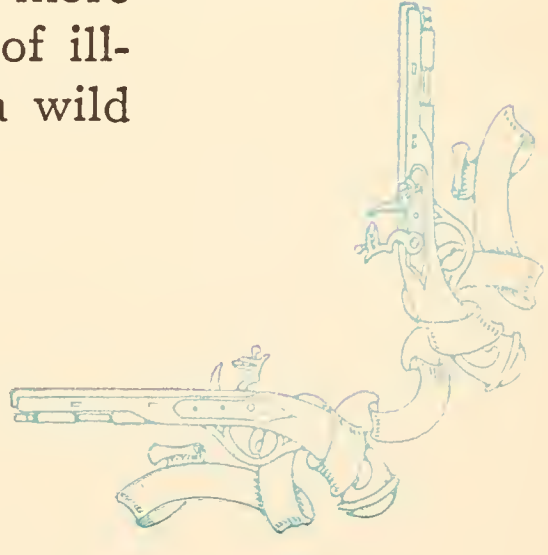
outlying pickets, the hero of a dozen gallant adventures?

"How are you, Gemini?" cried Tom, looking back.

"Oh, we're fine," roared Bill, his teeth chattering with cold.

At the river they were stopped a minute. McLane gave the password, "Washington," and at dusk they tramped over the bridge and were at once among General Varney's brigades.

Bill had ceased to ask questions. Harry, again uneasy at the sight of soldiers, wept unseen, and even Tom felt a certain awe at thus facing the unknown. He was more at ease as he saw hundreds of ill-clad men making merry in a wild



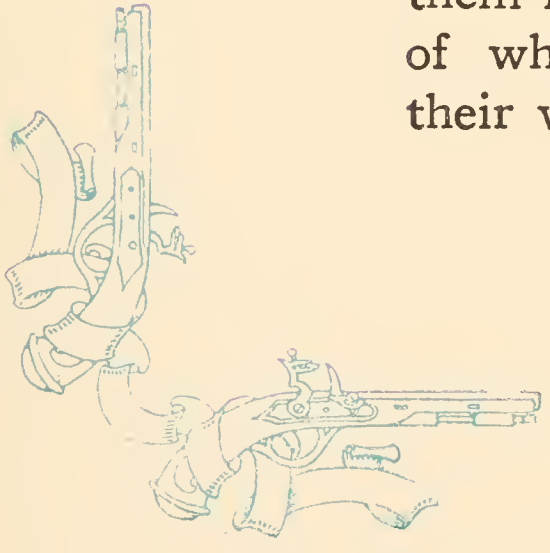
snowball fight, shouting and laughing.

They rode in the gloom through dimly-seen rows of log huts, and at one of them McLane dismounted.

"Take your men in," he said to a Lieutenant. "Report at headquarters and say I shall be there in an hour." He lifted the twins from their perches and bade the three enter his hut. "This is my home, boys. Come in."

It was a tiny log cabin with a stone-built chimney and a big fire; wood alone was to be had—in plenty.

The twins felt better after he gave them in turn a teaspoonful or two of whisky in water, laughed at their wry faces as they drank, set



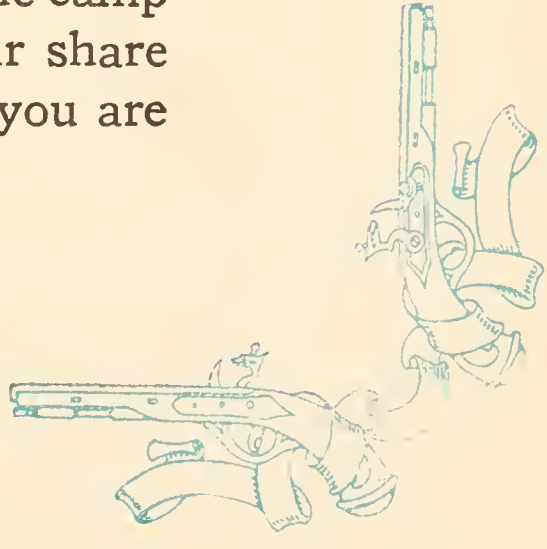
Harry on his knee, patted him on the back, and bade them make free of his stale biscuit and the potatoes he roasted in the hot ashes.

The twins, as they got warm in this pleasant company, talked of their adventures. Tom sat in silence.

"What's the matter?" asked McLane, getting only "yes" and "no" to his queries.

"I am thinking, sir, of my mother. Oh, but she will be troubled. I never thought of that when——"

"Be easy, my lad. To-morrow I am going into the city. I shall see her. When you can get back I do not know, but you will see the camp and the troops and get your share of a trooper's fare. When you are



warm I want you to come with me, Tom."

"Yes, sir. I am ready now."

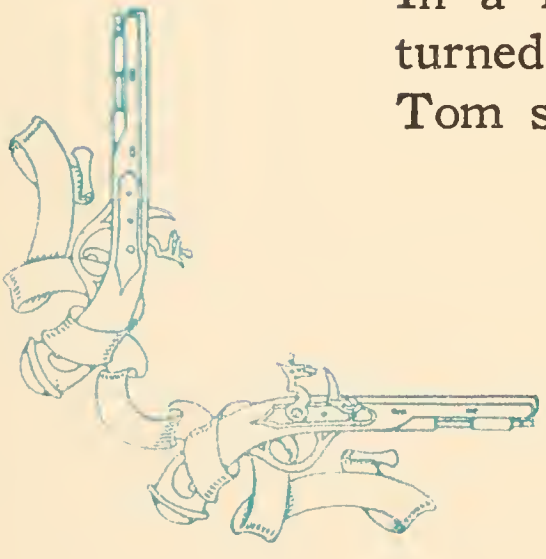
With a word to the twins he followed the Captain through the darkness.

The men were huddled around campfires and were cooking their scanty rations of pork and potatoes. Presently McLane paused at the door of a small stone house, the only one in the lines. A sentry walked to and fro before it.

McLane went in and said to an officer: "Mr. Tilghman, ask the General to see me. It is important."

In a few minutes the officer returned. "This way," he said.

Tom saw seated before the fire a



large man in buff-and-blue uniform. He rose, saying, "What news have you, Captain?"

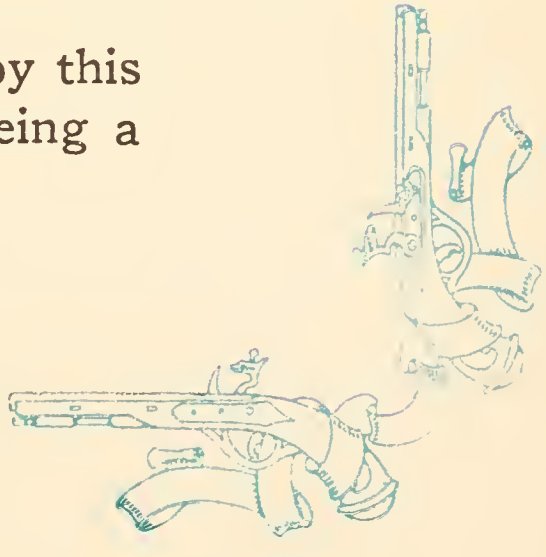
"This lad, sir, brought from the town at some peril this map and sketch. It seems to be some one's notion of an attack."

The tall officer put the sketch aside, but as he considered the map he said, looking up: "This is Major Montresor's own map and is invaluable. What is your name, my boy?"

"I'm a son of Colonel Markham, sir."

"A most gallant officer. And how, my lad, did you happen to get this map?"

Tom was a little disturbed by this authoritative gentleman. Being a



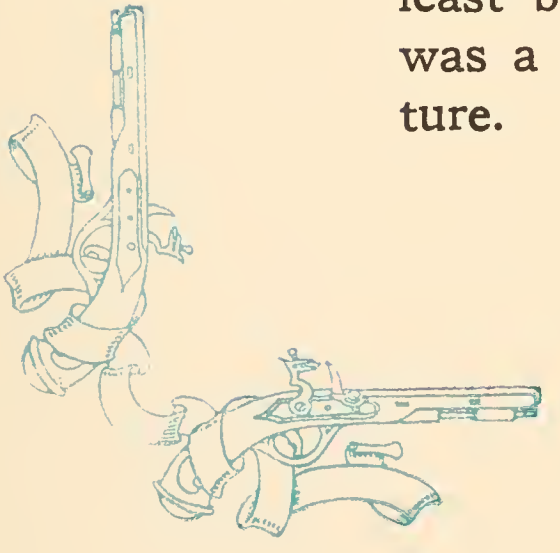
boy, he had, of course, been left standing, while McLane and the tall man were seated. He understood that he must stand until requested to sit, but it did add a little to a certain embarrassment, rare for Tom.

"Tell your story, Tom," said McLane.

"Well, sir, the horses ran away and the map was in the sleigh." Tom stopped. Action, not speech, was his gift, then and later.

"It is not very clear, but the lad is tired."

"Yes, sir," said Tom, without the least boy desire to describe what was a bold and dangerous adventure.



"Never mind your story now. Captain McLane will tell me later. You are a brave lad, and if God had given me one like you I should have been glad."

Tom felt somehow that he was well rewarded.

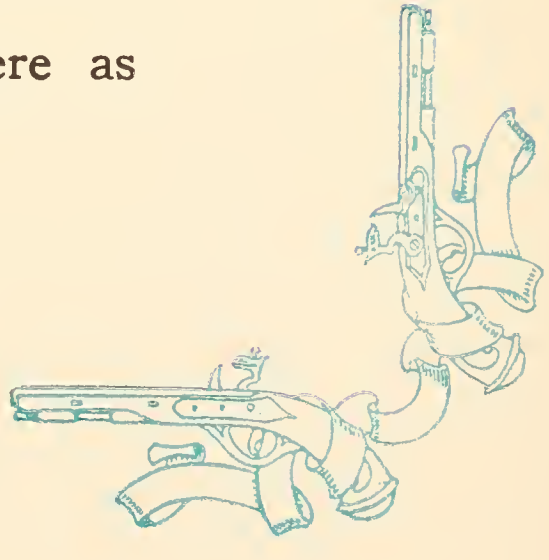
"But," added the tall man, setting kind, blue eyes on the lad, "this will make a great stir, and you will, I fear, suffer for it when you reach home."

"Yes, sir," said Tom. "And the twins?"

"Twins? What's this, McLane?"

"There were three in the business," said the Captain.

"Indeed. I wish there were as much spirit in the army."



"After all, sir," said McLane, "what can they do to a mere boy whose horses ran away?"

"But how are they to get to the city?"

"I will see to that, sir, and let Mrs. Markham know."

"Yes, yes, quite right. Now I must be excused." He rose and shook hands with Tom, and bowed to the officer.

"Come, Tom," said McLane.

Tom made his best bow and they went out into the cold December night. Then Tom asked, "Who was that General?"

"Good gracious, my boy, I thought you knew. That was General Washington. He might have

thanked you more. But that's his way."

"I think he said enough, sir."

McLane looked at the young face, now elate and smiling and then quiet in thought.

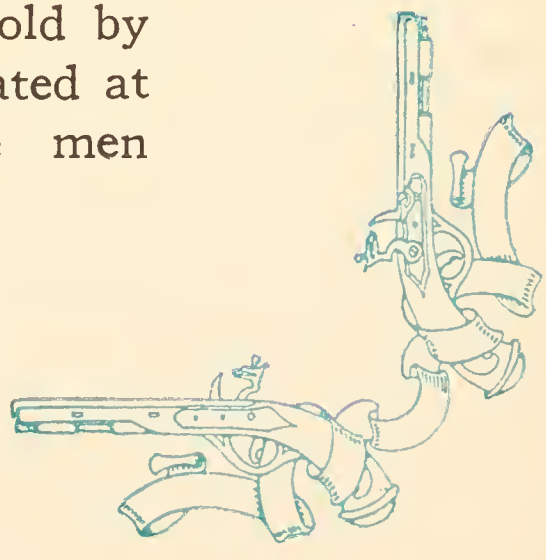
The Lieutenant was waiting in the hut when Tom and the Captain returned.

McLane said: "I shall be away for a day or more. Their mother must hear news of these lads. I leave them in your care, Lieutenant."

"Yes, sir."

The Captain said good-by and was gone for two days.

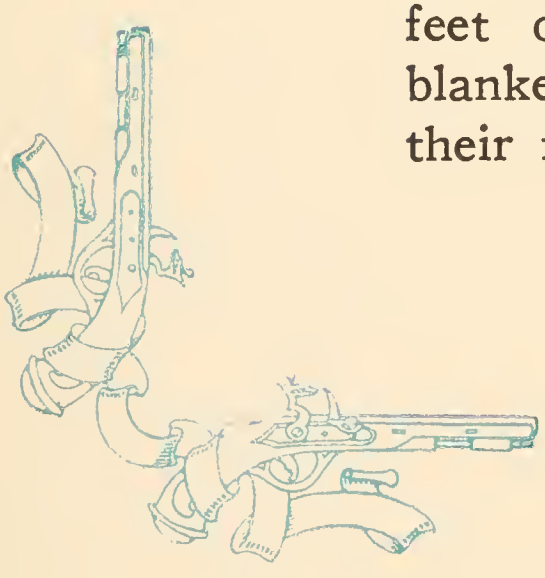
Meanwhile the story was told by the troopers and soon repeated at the campfires, where the men



amused themselves mightily with the twins and their narratives.

Tom held his tongue, and wandering saw the earthworks, and the ragged soldiers making shoes out of old blankets and plaited straw, or cooking frozen potatoes and decayed pickled herring, and growling over their diet.

He saw the army wagons come in with wood, the worn-out traces replaced by grapevines. He saw men on guard relieved every hour for fear of frozen feet which were shoeless, and more than once a sentry standing on his hat for relief, with feet double wrapped in bits of blanket. He ate of horse beef at their fires or rode proudly at the

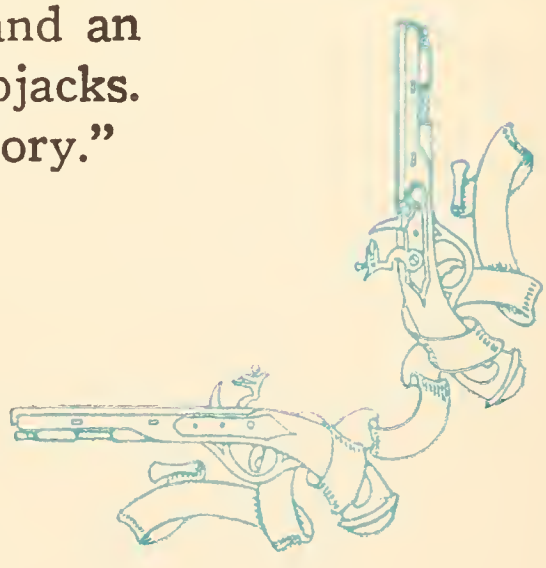


head of McLane's troops down the hill and into the lines of General Greene's brigades.

The twins, too, kept him busy. They climbed with him the slope of Mount Misery and saw the bridge over the Schuylkill, and on the posts which supported it burned in the names of favorite Generals—Washington, Putnam, Greene and Lafayette. Once Harry, in delicious fear, was allowed to touch off the evening gun.

At dusk on December 28th the lads found McLane again in his hut.

"Hurrah, boys," he cried, "I have a bag of flour, four sausages and an aged hen. Let's make slapjacks. After we have fed I have a story."

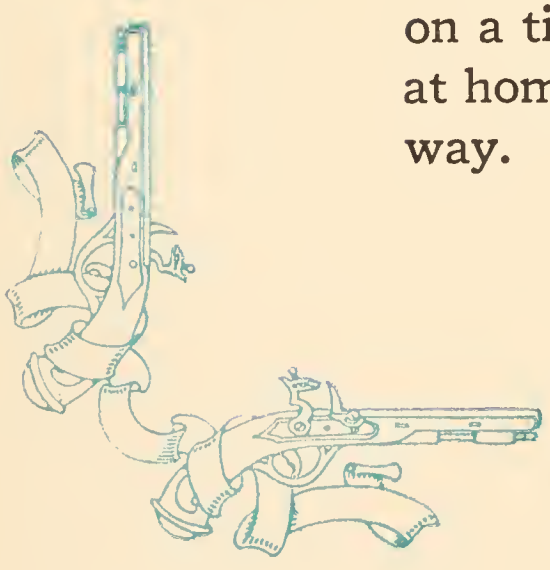


They had been better fed than their soldier hosts, for, if it was not much at a time, there was something to be had at every hut or campfire, and by this accumulation of forage they kept themselves fairly supplied. But sausage and slapjacks and fried chicken! The boys had their fill for the first time since they left home. Then they lay on the floor before the fire. The twins looked expectant.

"You promised us a story," said Bill, "when you came back."

"I shall be as good as my word."

"I don't want it to begin with 'Once on a time,' " said Harry, now quite at home. "They always begin that way. The Count told us a story on

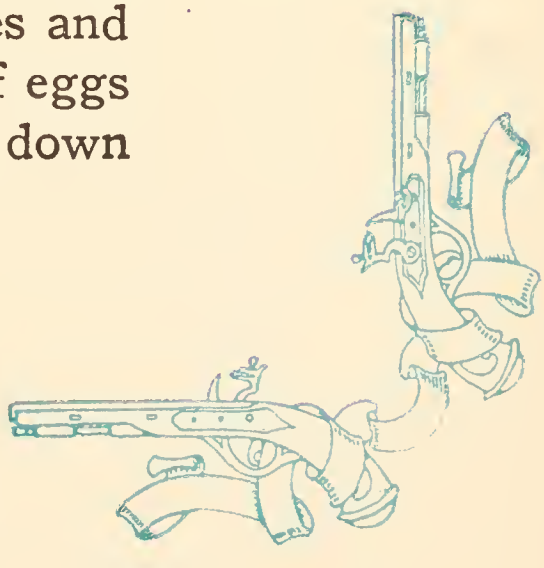


Christmas Eve about an angel and it turned out that it wasn't a real one after all."

"That was terrible," said the Captain. "My story is true. Now and then I go into Philadelphia to see the troops and where they are."

"But isn't that dangerous?" asked Tom, who knew well what was the fate of a spy.

"Well, rather. I should be hanged if I were caught, but you see they don't catch me. Two days ago I rode with a trooper to a deserted barn, and there I put on a Quaker bonnet and old woman's clothes and shoes and horn spectacles and with a crutch and a basket of eggs I got of a farmer, I walked down



Lancaster Pike and hobbled over the floating bridge.

"Any one with provisions can get in and have a pass to get out and I have been in town several times and am pretty well known as Mrs. Price. I sold my eggs, some of them to Sir William Howe's cook. Then I went to your house."

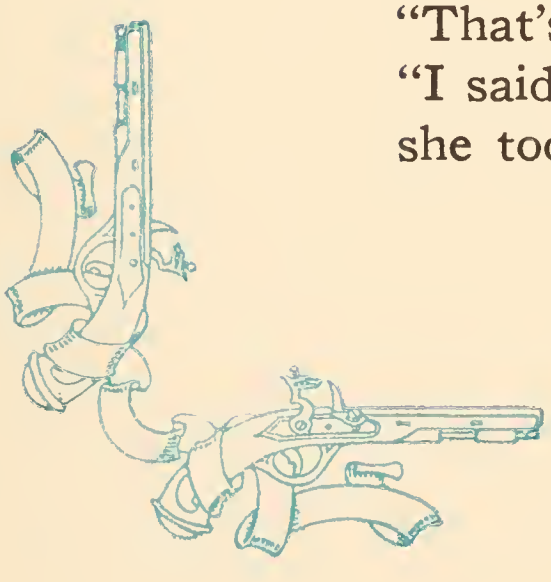
"Oh, and you saw mother?" cried Harry.

"Shut up," said Bill; "I want to hear."

"When I came to your house, I went to the back gate and was let in by a black cook—"

"That's Nancy," said Bill.

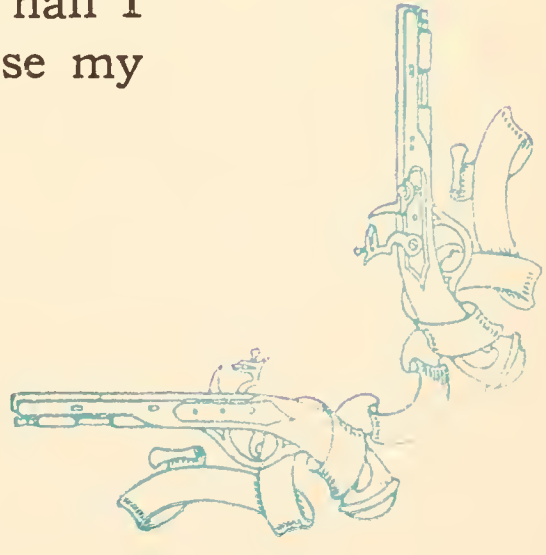
"I said I had eggs for sale. Then she took me to the hall and I sat



down. There I saw that red-nosed Colonel come in. I was knitting a stocking and was pretty busy, with my spectacles on. Your mother asked the price of my eggs and where I lived. When the Colonel heard I lived near Valley Forge and had had a lift on a farmer's cart to get to town, he asked about the troops here. I told him some fine yarns, and with this he went away. I should like to catch him and swap him off for your father."

"Did you see Captain Verney?" asked Tom.

"Yes. I am a bit afraid of him. When he came through the hall I had to turn my back because my garter was coming down.



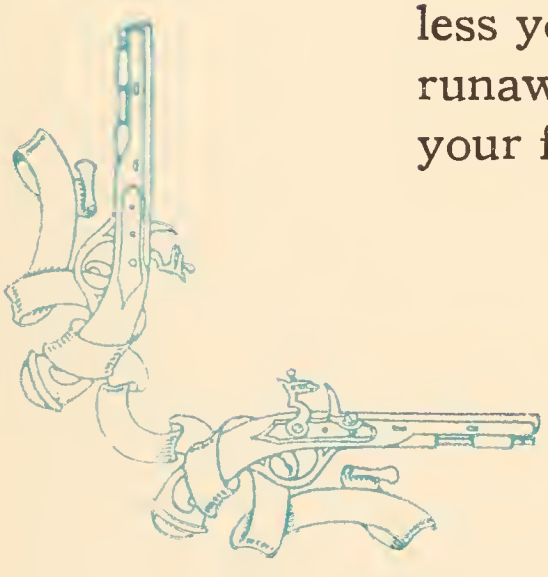
"Your mother and I bargained for my eggs and at last the maid took them. Then I whispered, 'Could I see thee alone?' She said 'Yes' and took me into the parlor.

"I said: 'Mrs. Markham, thou hast no need to be troubled. The boys are safe at Valley Forge. The horses ran away.'

"When I said this she cried, and just sat down and said: 'I have been so distressed, but—I knew—Tom—was to be trusted.' "

"Oh!" exclaimed Tom, "did my mother say that?"

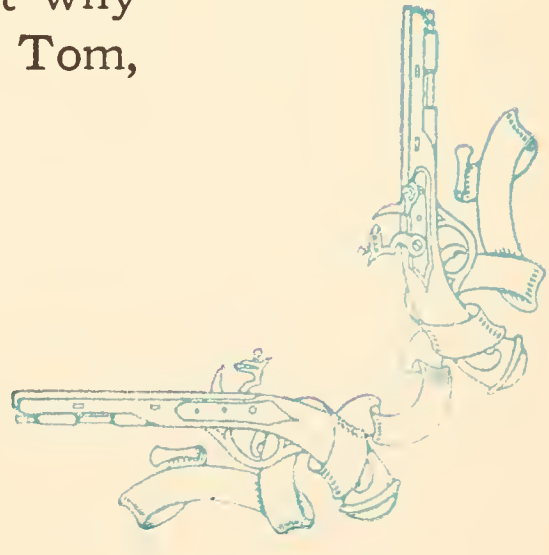
"Yes, she said that. I think the less you fellows say at home of the runaway the better for you and your friend, Captain Verney. You



see, the lost map will make a heap of trouble for him—and for you, too, if you are not careful.

"Then your mother began to ask questions, but I said I was in a hurry, and that on New Year's Eve she must get a pass for a chaise and man to meet you on the west side of the middle ferry about nine at night. I said too, 'Thy boys may have difficulty about a map. Best to see them alone before Grimstone can question them. It was very foolish for them to run away with that map.'

"When I spoke of the map she laughed and said: 'Was that why the horses ran away? Oh, Tom, Tom!'



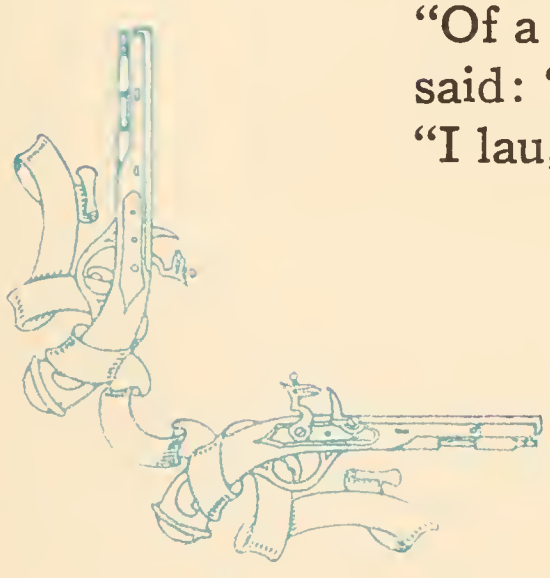
"Then I said: 'They can't do anything to your boys.'

" 'No, but Mr. Verney and the Colonel were much blamed and are very cross. However, that night I can see the boys alone. The officers—I mean the Colonel and Captain Verney—are to take supper with Mr. Penn at his house over the river.'

"I asked if it was the place in the woods above the Schuylkill, the place he calls The Solitude. I wanted to be sure. Your mother said: 'Yes. It is there, I believe.' It set me to thinking.

"Of a sudden she turned on me and said: 'You are no Quaker.'

"I laughed and said: 'No, madam, I



"Of a sudden she turned on me and said:
'You are no Quaker'"

am Captain Allan McLane, at your service.'

"This did scare her for the risk I ran, but I said there was none. She sent you her love. That's all my story. We found the horses, Tom. I shall take one and my Lieutenant the other."

"I don't like that," said Tom.

"Spoils of war, sir; and now get to bed."

"And the fur coats?" asked Tom, anxiously honest.

"We shall return the Count's. I shall keep the Colonel's. Now to bed, boys."

"Thank you, sir," said Tom.

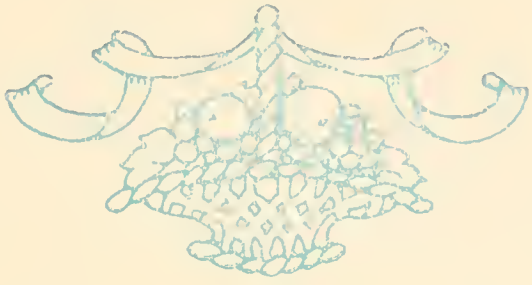
"That was a fine story," said Bill. "I like real true stories."

"And it ends just right," said Harry.

"Oh, that is not the end," laughed McLane.

Then the boys were curious and questioned their friend, but he would tell them no more.

"To bed," he cried, and rolled them up in blankets on the cabin floor.



CHAPTER IV

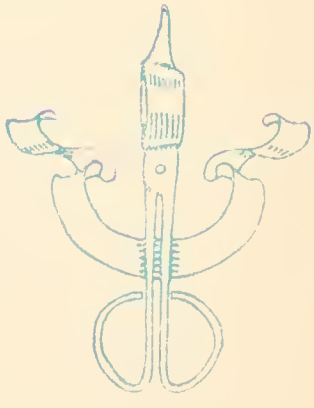
In Which Tom Is Made a Colonel

CHAPTER IV

THE days went by, and on the afternoon of December thirtieth the boys rode out of camp, the twins well wrapped up in front of troopers, and Tom mounted on a troop-horse. The day was pleasant and warm for the season, and McLane pushed on at speed down the west side of the river.

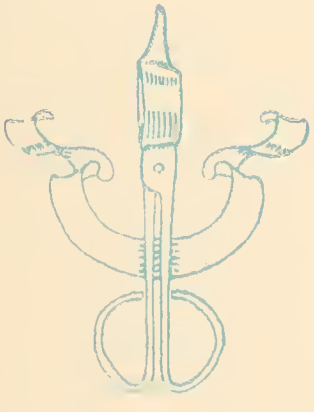
It was a long and hard ride and the twins were tired when, nine miles from the city, at a friendly farmer's, pickets were put out and they spent the night and were well fed.

They stayed all of that day at the



farm, and at seven on New Year's Eve the Sergeant went back to camp, leaving but six men. Presently, to Tom's amazement, McLane came out of the barn with his Lieutenant, both dressed as British officers and the men as King's soldiers. Then they mounted as before and rode slowly toward town. Tom, very curious, asked questions. McLane laughed: "Only a little fancy ball, Tom, and don't talk. I want to think. Later I hope to send you a dispatch." Tom was puzzled, but rode on in silence.

About nine at night they were just outside of the English pickets, not far from the Schuylkill. Here they rode into a wood and dismounted.



Then McLane on foot led the boys down the Lancaster road.

"Yonder," he said, "is a guard. As it is very dark you may get by unseen. If not, you must say you are boys from town and have lost your way. Not a word of me. Be careful. At the middle ferry bridge you will find a chaise and your manservant. Now be silent and careful, and good-by, Colonel Markham."

Full of the boy-delight in an adventure so real, Tom went on in the darkness with the twins. He saw against the sky a guard on a little hillock above the road. A thicket of briers lined the wayside.

Tom halted and whispered: "We

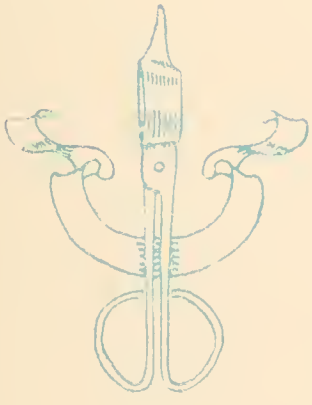
have got to creep, Gemini, and play bears. No noise, and go slow."

With this the three went down on their hands and knees in the snow, and, Tom leading, crept by the sentry on the bank, who was stamping and beating his breast to keep warm.

"Now," said Tom, "for a run to get warmed up;" and, unseen, they ran through the darkness on the well-trodden snow of the mid-pike.

They soon found the chaise and their servant. He had a pass so that they easily went by the guard and after a short drive were at home and in their mother's arms.

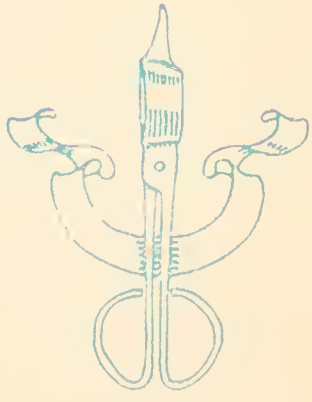
When the boys left him, McLane, a little anxious, looked after them



for a time and returned to his men. They tied their horses in the wood, and, leaving a man to care for them, one by one crawled through the thin line of pickets, who were much occupied in keeping themselves warm.

It was very dark, and again the snow was falling and a fierce wind blowing. At last the men came together at a low whistle from McLane.

They were now close to the house where, in the wood above the Schuylkill, Mr. Penn was pleased to entertain his friends. It was a quaint little house and still stands to-day in the Zoological Gardens. There is a small entrance hall, a

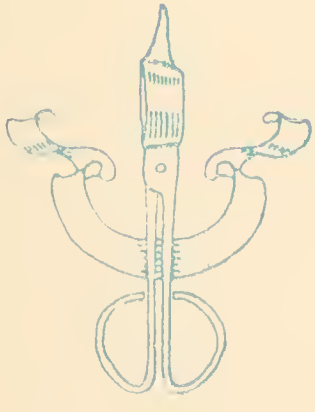


winding stair, and on the left a descent to a long underground passage ending in two large, cool-storage rooms. One large chamber on the first floor looks eastward over the river.

McLane knew it all well. It was now long after nine and very dark. The partisan officer was safe between the pickets he had passed and those along the west shore far below the house.

Leaving his men near the door he went around the house. Then, approaching a window, he cautiously looked into the room. A dozen candles were on the table, and many more in sconces on the wall.

At the table sat Mr. Galloway, the



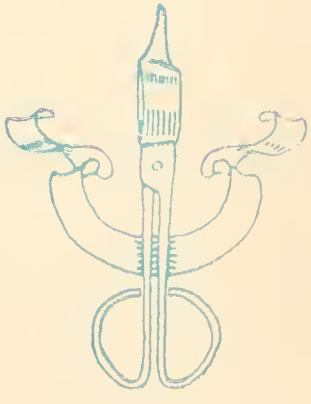
British superintendent of police, a staunch Tory, Mr. Penn, Colonel Grimstone and Captain Verney. There were several empty chairs. Supper was over. There were empty bottles on the table and a big bowl of punch.

The Colonel had removed his stiff regulation stock. Galloway had unbuttoned his embroidered waistcoat. Verney was looking at his watch.

"A nice party," said McLane. "Will it incline to be hospitable?" Then he returned to the front.

The Lieutenant said: "Their horses are in the stable, the grooms asleep beside a fireplace."

A man was put at each window, two



left at the door, and, it being now near to ten, McLane quietly entered the hall, and then, with his Lieutenant, appeared in the supper-room. Mr. Penn arose.

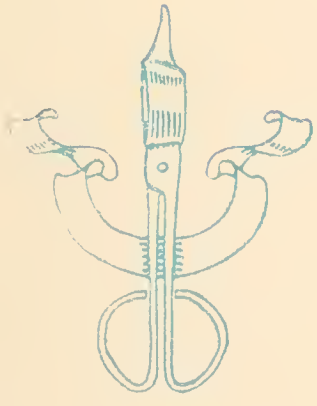
"Good-evening, sir," said McLane. "Lieutenant Hand and I have had a long ride, and seeing your lights took the liberty ——"

"Oh, most welcome—as are all gentlemen of His Majesty's service. Sit down, sir. Colonel Grimstone, you may know these officers."

"Never saw them in all my life," said the Colonel gruffly.

Captain Verney rose and bowed. "I beg pardon," he said, "I did not catch your name."

"Captain Head, at your service."



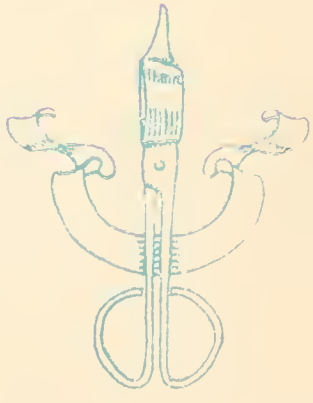
"That's queer," said Grimstone; "Head and Hand."

"Sit down," said the host. "Oh, by George, the servants have gone and —— Verney, you are the youngest and you know the way, would you fetch some wine for us from the cellar?"

McLane said a word to his Lieutenant, who rose, apologizing. "I want to see to the horses. Be back in a moment."

In the hall he saw Verney take a lantern and go down to the cellar. The Lieutenant waited a moment, shot bolt and lock behind the Captain, and, returning, sat down by Galloway.

"Pray throw off your cloaks, gentle-



men," said Penn. "Will you drink, Captain Head?"

McLane cast his cloak back from his left shoulder and set a hand on his pistols.

"I never drink while on duty, Mr. Penn. You must hold me excused."

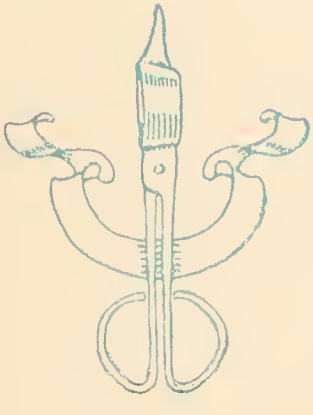
"As you please, sir," answered Penn.

"What's your regiment?" inquired Grimstone in a thick voice.

"McLane's horse! And if a man moves there will be two dead." For a pistol was at the forehead of both the Colonel and Galloway.

They were startled, but had wit enough to understand a very unpleasant situation.

"Don't do that!" cried Grimstone.



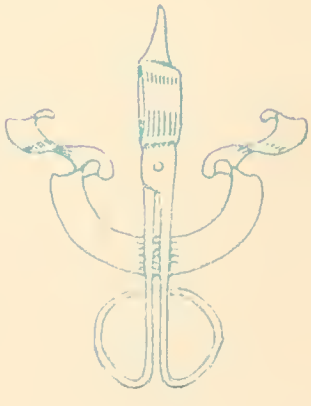
Galloway sat as still and as pale as a statue.

"I am sorry, Mr. Penn, to disturb you," said McLane; "but, as I have neither eaten of your salt nor drunk at your board, you will pardon me. Neither do I want you or Mr. Galloway," he continued, "if you will say, on your honor, that you will not leave this room nor give the alarm for half an hour."

Penn said: "Needs must. You know the proverb, Captain McLane."

Galloway said: "Oh, I swear."

"Kindly put your watch on the table, Mr. Penn. Ten, I see. Captain Verney is locked in the cellar. My regards to him. Come Colonel;



and on the honor of a gentleman if you speak or resist I shall kill you. Good-night, Mr. Penn."

The Colonel rose with his captor and went out.

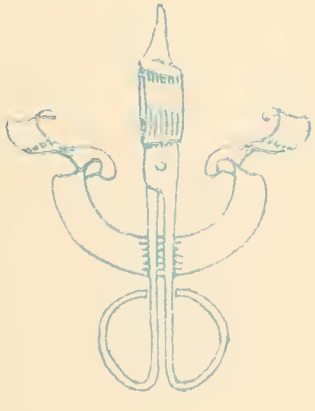
"Sergeant, put this gentleman between two men and call in the rest. If he ventures to give the alarm shoot him."

"Yes, sir."

"Good Heavens!" said Penn to Galloway, "A nice ending for a supper. That fellow missed Sir William Howe by only ten minutes."

"Hark! What was that?" said Galloway. Distant shots rang sharp through the cold night air.

"They have had trouble with the pickets."

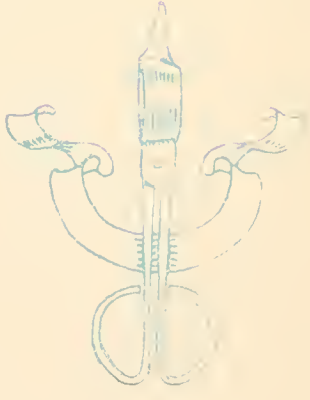


"Hope they caught them," said Galloway.

Penn returned: "He is one of the kind that catches and is never caught." Then, as the noise of a great thumping and pounding fell on his ears, he added: "Just listen to Verney!" And he fell back in his chair convulsed with laughter. "No, don't move, Galloway. It wants fourteen minutes of the half-hour. Sir William was in luck."

A little later the amazed and disgusted Verney heard the story. "He did not want me, I suppose."

He knew later that, because of being a gentleman and courteously kind to Tom's mother, McLane was pleased to forget him.



The Colonel failed to appear at home that night. Verney was late in returning, and only at breakfast did Mrs. Markham and the boys, to their relief, and greatly to Tom's delight, learn of the capture of their unmannerly guest.

Then the Captain, still a little cross, turned on Tom.

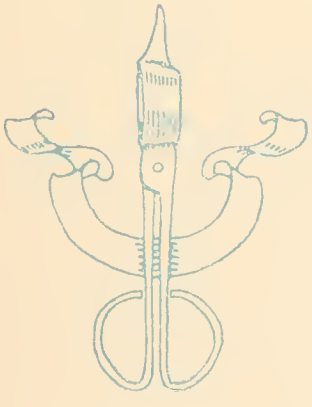
"Now, sir," he asked, "did you run away with the sleigh or the sleigh with you?"

The Count much amused listened.

Tom was cornered. Very red in the face, he replied: "The horses ran away with both, sir."

"I may assure Sir William that the horses ran away?"

Tom felt that he was well within



the boundary of truth as he said, "Yes. They ran like everything. We upset, and Captain McLane found us and took us to Valley Forge."

"And what, sir, became of the map we left in the sleigh?"

Tom wriggled.

"I want an answer."

"General Washington has it."

"Did you give it to him?"

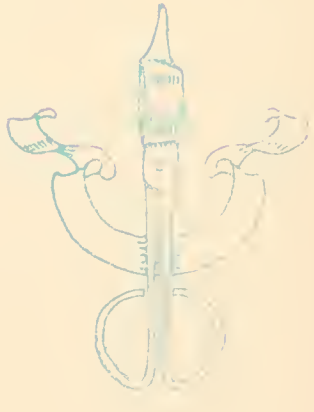
"No, sir. Captain McLane gave it to him."

"I think," remarked the Count, "that you had better stop here."

That was also Tom's opinion.

"The map was in the coat-pocket, I remember."

"Yes, sir. I was to tell Count Ein-



stein, with Captain McLane's compliments, that his coat is at Farmer Nixon's, near the Cross Keys Tavern. He said you could easily get it."

The Count expressed his pleasure, and Verney asked no further questions.

A few days later, just before supper, Tom burst into the room with the twins after him.

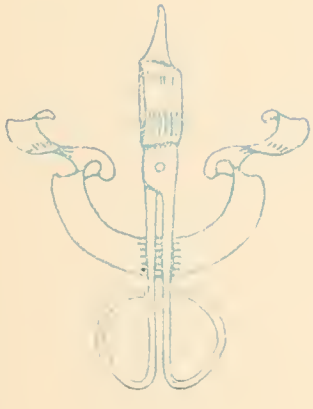
"He's got a letter!" cried Bill.

"He won't let us see it!" cried Harry.

They fell on Tom and rolled in wild laughter on the floor.

"This is too much," said Mrs. Markham.

Verney rose, and with two or three



mild kicks separated the fighting, laughing tangle of legs and arms. Then he caught the elder boy by the collar and said: "Stand up on your hind legs, Tom, and tell me what this row is about."

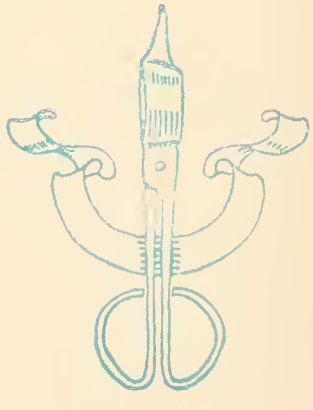
"He's got a letter," said Bill, "a Quaker man, a farmer, left it; and he won't let us see it till mother reads it."

"Where is it?" said Verney.

"Here, sir. You're choking me. You may read it. There's a message for you."

Captain Verney looked at the address and read, laughing, "This with haste."

"With your permission, madam," he said; then he read aloud:



"Valley Forge, January 7, 1778.

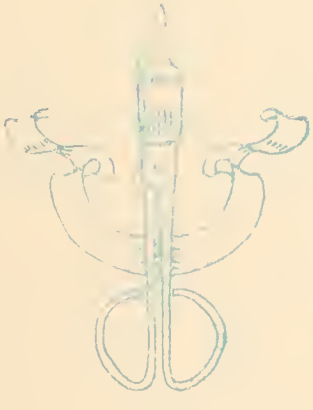
"To Colonel Thomas Markham, Jr., late of Captain Allan McLane's Company, Continental Line——"

"That's me!" said Tom.

"Indeed!" He turned to the contents.

"Dear Colonel:—I beg to report that after leaving you on the road with Gemini I had the pleasure of capturing Colonel Gravestone, now here on parole and a low diet. He says his name is Grimstone, but what can be grimmer than Gravestone, and grim he is and grave. We shall swap him off for Colonel Markham.

"My compliments to Captain the



Honorable John Verney. Having been a kind and courteous guest I forgot him. It was against the rules of the service, but I trust, sir, you will not have me court-martialed. The map found in the coat proves useful. My thanks to Major Montresor.

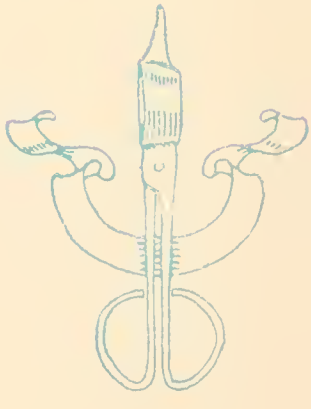
"Remember me to your mother.

"I have the honor to be your very obedient humble servant and brother-officer.

"Allan McLane.

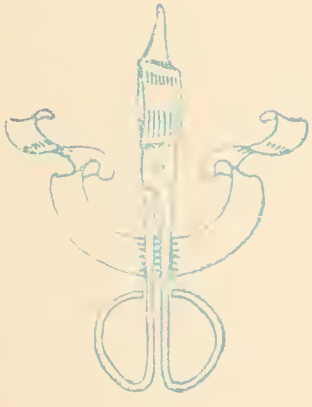
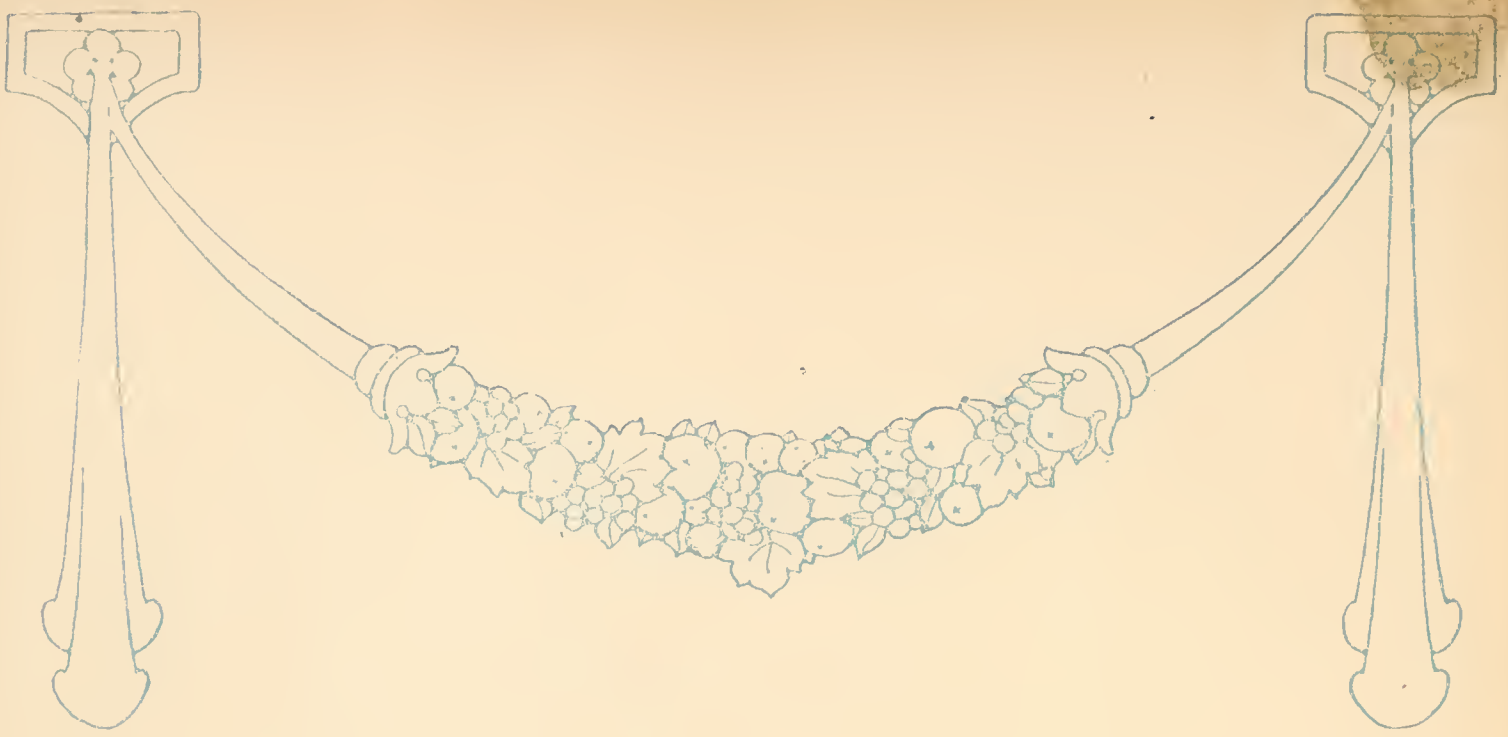
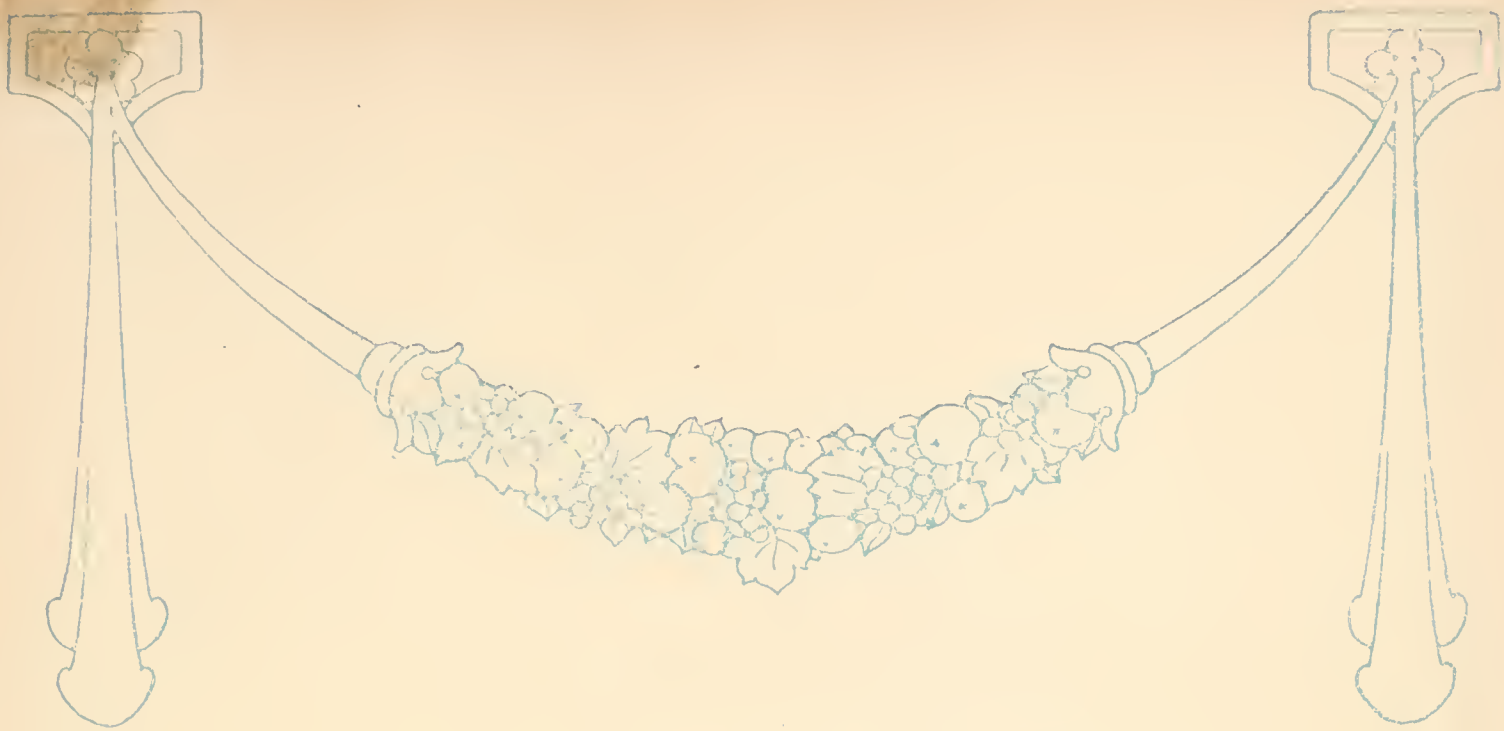
"Postscript:—I promised you an ending to my story, and here it is."

"Well of all the impertinent things!" cried Verney; "but, my dear Count, I should like to see



'Gravestone' among these gentlemen, and, on my word, I should like to meet this brave and merry officer."

The Colonel spent two months and more on parole at Valley Forge. He lost four stone and became meek.

In the spring he was exchanged for a better man, Colonel Markham, but no amount of food, as he swore, ever enabled him to make up for the scant fare he had had in the camp of the Continentals.

The twins and Tom lived to enjoy many Christmas Days, but none like that they spent with the army at Valley Forge in the hard winter of 1777-8.